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EXPOSITIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D., Litt. D.

EPHESIANS EPISTLES OF ST. PETER AND ST. JOHN



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*EXPOSITIONS OF
HOLY SCRIPTURE*

ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D., Litt. D.

Div. S.

EPHESIANS

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
SAINTS AND FAITHFUL (Eph. i. 1)	1
'ALL SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS' (Eph. i. 3)	8
'ACCORDING TO'—I. (Eph. i. 5, 7)	18
'ACCORDING TO'—II. (Eph. i. 7)	26
GOD'S INHERITANCE AND OURS (Eph. i. 11, 14)	35
THE EARNEST AND THE INHERITANCE (Eph. i. 14)	43
THE HOPE OF THE CALLING (Eph. i. 18)	52
GOD'S INHERITANCE IN THE SAINTS (Eph. i. 18)	62
THE MEASURE OF IMMEASURABLE POWER (Eph. i. 19, 20)	72
THE RESURRECTION OF DEAD SOULS (Eph. ii. 4, 5)	81
'THE RICHES OF GRACE' (Eph. ii. 7)	91
SALVATION : GRACE : FAITH (Eph. ii. 8, R. V.)	98
GOD'S WORKMANSHIP AND OUR WORKS (Eph. ii. 10)	108
THE CHIEF CORNER-STONE (Eph. ii. 20, R. V.)	118

SAINTS AND FAITHFUL

'The saints which are at Ephesus and the faithful in Christ Jesus.'—EPH. I. 1.

THAT is Paul's way of describing a church. There were plenty of very imperfect Christians in the community at Ephesus and in the other Asiatic churches to which this letter went. As we know, there were heretics amongst them, and many others to whom the designation of 'holy' seemed inapplicable. But Paul classes them all under one category, and describes the whole body of believing people by these two words, which must always go together if either of them is truly applied, 'saints' and 'faithful.'

Now I think that from this simple designation we may gather two or three very obvious indeed, and very familiar and old-fashioned, but also very important, thoughts.

I. A Christian is a saint.

We are accustomed to confine the word to persons who tower above their brethren in holiness and manifest godliness and devoutness. The New Testament never does anything like that. Some people fancy that nobody can be a saint unless he wears a special uniform of certain conventional sanctities. The New Testament does not take that point of view at all, but regards all true believers in Jesus Christ as being, therein and thereby, saints.

Now, what does it mean by that? The word at bottom simply signifies separation. Whatever is told

off from a mass for a specific purpose would be called, if it were a thing, 'holy.' But there is one special kind of separation which makes a person a saint, and that is separation to God, for His uses, in obedience to His commandment, that He may employ the man as He will. So in the Old Testament the designation 'holy' was applied quite as much to the high priest's mitre or to the sacrificial vessels of the Temple as it was to the people who used them. It did not imply originally, and in the first place, moral qualities at all, but simply that this person or that thing belonged to God. But then you cannot belong to God unless you are like Him. There can be no consecration to God except the heart is being purified. So the ordinary meaning of holiness, as moral purity and cleanness from sin, necessarily comes from the original meaning, separation and devotion to the service of God.

Thus we get the whole significance of Christian holiness. We are to belong to God, and to know that we do belong to Him. We are to be separated from the mass of people and things that have no consciousness of ownership and do not yield themselves up to Him for His use. But we cannot belong to Him, and be devoted to His service, unless we are being made day by day pure in heart, and like Him to whom we say that we belong. A human being can only be God's by the surrender of heart and will, and through the continual appropriation into his own character and life, of righteousness and purity like that which belongs to God. Holiness is God's stamp upon a man, His 'mark,' by which He says—This man belongs to Me. As you write your name in a book, so God writes His name on His property, and the name that He writes is the likeness of His own character.

Note, again, that in God's church there is no aristocracy of sanctity, nor does the name of saint belong only to those who live high above the ordinary tumults of life and the secularities of daily duty. You may be as true a saint in a factory—ay! and a far truer one—than in a hermitage. You do not need to cultivate a mediæval or Roman Catholic type of ascetic piety in order to be called saints. You do not need to be amongst the select few to whom it is given here upon earth, but not given without their own effort, to rise to the highest summits of holy conformity with the divine will. But down amongst all the troubles and difficulties and engrossing occupations of our secular work, you may be living saintly lives; for the one condition of being holy is that we should know whose we are and whom we serve, and we can carry the consciousness of belonging to Him into every corner of the poorest, most crowded, and most distracted life, recognising His presence and seeking to do His will. The saint is the man who says, 'O Lord, truly I am Thy servant; Thou hast loosed my bonds.' Because He has loosed my bonds, the bonds that held me to my sins, He has therein fastened me with far more stringent bonds of love to the sweet and free service of His redeeming love. All His children are His saints.

The Old Testament ritual had one sacrifice which carried this truth in it. It is the first prescribed in the Book of Leviticus, the ceremonial book—namely, the burnt offering. Its especial meaning was this, that the whole man is to be laid upon God's altar and there consumed in the fire of a divine love. It began with expiation, as all sacrifices must, and on the footing of expiation there followed the transformation, by the fire of God, from gross earthliness into vapour and

odour which went up in wreaths of fragrance acceptable to God. So *we* are to be laid upon the divine altar. So, because we have been accepted in the Beloved, and have received the atonement for our sins through His great sacrifice, we are to be consecrated to His service and, touched by the fire which He sends down, we are to be changed into a sweet odour acceptable to Him as were 'the saints which are in Ephesus.'

II. Further, Christian men are saints because they are believers.

'The saints' and 'the faithful' are not two sets of people, but one. The Apostle starts, as it were, on the surface, and goes down; takes off the uppermost layer and lets us see what is below it; begins with the flowers or the fruit, and then carries us to the root. The saints are saints because they are first of all faithful. 'Faithful' here, of course, does not mean, as it usually does in our ordinary language, 'true' and 'trusty,' 'reliable' and 'keeping our word,' but it means simply 'believing'; having faith, not in the sense of *fidelity*, but in the sense of *trust*.

So, then, here is Paul's notion—and it is not only Paul's notion, it is God's truth—that the only way by which a man ever comes to realise that he belongs to God, and to yield himself in glad surrender to His uses, and so to become pure and holy like Him whom He loves and aspires to, is by humble faith in Jesus Christ. If you want to talk in theological terminology, sanctification follows upon faith. It is when we believe and trust in Jesus Christ that all the great motives begin to tell upon life and heart, which deliver us from our selfishness, which bind us to God, which make it a joy to do anything for His service, which kindle in our

hearts the flame of fructifying and consecrating and transforming love. Faith, the simple reliance of a desperate and therefore trusting heart upon Jesus Christ for all that it needs, is the foundation of the loftiest elevation and attainment of the Christian character. We begin down there that we may set the shining topstone of 'Holiness to the Lord' upon the heaven-pointing summit of our lives.

Note how here Paul sets forth the object of our faith and the blessedness of it. I do not think I am forcing too much meaning into his words when I ask you to notice with what distinct emphasis and intentional fulness he employs the double name of our Lord here to describe the object upon which our faith fixes, 'Faithful in *Christ Jesus*.' We must lay hold of the Manhood, and we must lay hold of the office. We must rest our soul's salvation on Him as our brother, Jesus who was incarnate in sinful flesh for us; and we must also rest it on Him as God's anointed, who came in human flesh to fulfil the divine loving-kindness and purposes, and in that flesh to die. A faith in a Jesus who was not a Christ would not sanctify; a faith in a Christ who is not Jesus would be impalpable and impotent. We must take the two together, believing and feeling that we lay hold upon a loving Man, 'bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh'; and also upon Him who in His very humanity is the Messenger and Angel of God's covenant; the Christ for whom the way has been being prepared from the beginning, and who has come to fulfil all the purposes of the divine heart.

And notice, too, how there is suggested here also, the blessedness of that faith, inasmuch as it is a faith *in* Christ. The New Testament speaks in diverse ways about the relation between the believing soul and

Jesus Christ. It sometimes speaks of faith as being *towards* Him, and that suggests the going out of a hand that, as it were, stretches towards what it would lay hold of. It sometimes speaks of faith as being *on* Him, which suggests the idea of a building on its foundation, or a hand leaning on a support. And it sometimes speaks, as here, of faith being '*in* Him,' which suggests the folded wings of the dove that has found its nest, the repose of faith, the quiet rest in the Lord, and 'waiting patiently for Him.' Such trust so directed is the one condition of such tranquillity. Then, again, note a Christian is all that he is because he is '*in* Christ.' That phrase '*in* Him' is in some sense the keynote of this Epistle to the Ephesians. If you will look over the letter, and pick out all the connections in which the expression '*in* Him' occurs, I think you will be astonished to see how rich and full are its uses, and how manifold the blessings of which it is the condition. But the use which Paul makes of it here is just this—everything in our Christian life depends upon our being rooted and grafted in Jesus. Dear brethren, the main weakness, I believe, of what is called Evangelical Christianity has been that it has not always kept true to the proportionate prominence which the New Testament gives to the two thoughts, '*Christ for us*,' and '*Christ in us*.' For one sermon that you have heard which has dwelt earnestly and believingly on the thought of the indwelling Christ and the Christian indwelling in Him, you have heard a hundred about the Sacrifice on the Cross for sins, and the great atonement that was made by it. Those of you, who have listened to me from Sunday to Sunday, know that I am not to be charged with minimising or neglecting that truth, but I want to lay upon all your

hearts this earnest conviction, that a gospel which throws into enormous prominence 'Christ for us,' and into very small prominence 'Christ in us,' is lame of one foot, is lopsided, untrue to the symmetry and proportion of the Gospel as it is revealed in the New Testament, and will never avail for the nourishment and maturity of Christian souls. 'Christ for us' by all means, and for evermore, but 'Christ *in* us,' or else He will not be '*for* us.'

III. Lastly, a Christian may be a saint, and a believer, and in Christ Jesus, though he is in Ephesus.

Many of you know that probably the words 'in Ephesus' are no part of the original text of this epistle, which was apparently a circular letter, in which the designation of the various churches to which it was sent was left blank, to be filled in with the name of each little community to which Paul's messenger from Rome carried it. The copy from which our text was taken had probably been delivered at Ephesus; and, at any rate, one of the copies would go there. What was Ephesus? Satan's very headquarters and seat in Asia Minor, a focus of idolatry, superstition, wealth, luxury springing from commerce, and moral corruption. 'Great is Diana of the Ephesians.' The books of Ephesus were a synonym for magical books. Many of us know how rotten to the core the society of that great city was. And there, on the dunghill, was this little garden of fragrant and flowering plants. They were 'saints in Christ Jesus,' though they were 'saints in Ephesus.'

Never mind about surroundings. It is possible for us to keep ourselves in the love of God, and in the fellowship of His Son wherever we are, and whatever may lie around us. You and I have too to live in a big,

wicked city, and to work out our religion in a society honeycombed with corruption, because of commerce and other influences. Do not let us forget that these people whom Paul called 'saints' and 'faithful' had a harder fight to wage than we have, with less to hearten and strengthen them in it. Only remember if the 'saints in Ephesus' are to be 'in Christ,' they need to keep themselves very straight up. The carbonic acid gas is heavy and goes down to the bottom of the cave, and if a man will walk bolt upright, he will keep his nostrils above it; but if he stoops, he will get down into it. Walk straight up, with your head erect, looking to the Master, and your respiratory organs will be above the poison. If we are to *be* in Christ when we are in Ephesus, we need to keep ourselves separate and faithful, and to *keep ourselves* in Christ. If the diver comes out of the diving-bell he is drowned. If he keeps inside its crystal walls he may be on the bottom of the ocean, but he is dry and safe. Keep in the fortress by loyal faith, by humble realisation of His presence, by continual effort, and 'nothing shall by any means harm you,' but 'your lives shall be holy, being hid with Christ in God.'

'ALL SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS'

'Blessed be God . . . who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.'—EPH. I. 3.

It is very characteristic of Paul's impetuous fervour and exuberant faith that he begins this letter with a doxology, and plunges at once into the very heart of his theme. Colder natures reach such heights by slow degrees. He gains them at a bound, or rather, he

dwells there always. Put a pen into his hand, and it is like tapping a blast furnace; and out rushes a fiery stream at white heat. But there is a great deal more than fervour in the words. In the rush of his thoughts there is depth and method. We come slowly after, and try by analysing and meditation to recover some of the fervour and the fire of such utterances as this.

Notice that buoyant, joyous, emphatic reiteration: 'Blessed,' 'blest,' 'blessings.' That is more than the fascination exercised over a man's mind by a word; it covers very deep thoughts and goes very far into the centre of the Christian life. God blesses us by gifts; we bless Him by words. The aim of His act of blessing is to evoke in our hearts the love that praises. We receive first, and then, moved by His mercies, we give. Our highest response to His most precious gifts is that we shall 'take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord,' and in the depth of thankful and recipient hearts shall say, 'Blessed be God who hath blessed us.'

Now I think that I shall best bring out the deep meaning of these words if I simply follow them as they lie before us. I do not wish to say anything about our echo in blessing God. I wish to speak about the original sweet sound, His blessing to us.

I. And I note, first of all, the character and the extent of these blessings which are the constituents of the Christian life.

'All spiritual blessings,' says the Apostle. Now, I am not going to weary you with mere exegetical remarks, but I do want to lay stress upon this, that, when the Apostle speaks about 'spiritual blessings,' he does not merely use that word 'spiritual' as defining the region in us in which the blessings are given,

though that is also implied; but rather as pointing to the medium by which they are conferred. That is to say, he calls them 'spiritual,' not because they are, unlike material and outward blessings, gifts for the inner man, the true self, but because they are imparted to the waiting spirit by that Divine Spirit who communicates to men all the most precious things of God. They are 'spiritual' because the Holy Spirit is the medium of communication by which they reach men's spirits.

And I may just pause for one moment—and it shall only be for a moment—to point out to you how inwoven into the very texture of the writer's thoughts, and all the more emphatic because quite incidental, and needing to be looked for to be found, is here the evidence of his believing that the name of God was God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For it is the Father who is the Giver, the Son who is the Reservoir, the Spirit who is the Communicator, of these spiritual gifts. And I do not think that any man could have written these words of my text, the main purpose of which is altogether different to setting forth the mystery of the divine nature, unless he had believed in God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

But, apart altogether from that, let me remind you in one sentence of how the gifts which thus come to men by that Divine Spirit derive their characteristic quality from their very medium of communication. There are many other blessings for which we have to say, 'Blessed be God'; for all the gifts that come from 'the Father of Lights' are light, and everything that the Fountain of sweetness bestows upon mankind is sweet, but earthly blessings are but the shadow of blessing. They remain without us, and they pass. And

if they were all for which we had to praise God, our praises had need to be often checked by sobs and tears, and often very doubtful and questioning. If there were none other but such, and if this poor life were all, then I do not think it would be true that it is

‘better to have loved and lost,
Than never to have loved at all.’

It is but a quavering voice of praise, with many a sob between, that goes up to bless God for anything but spiritual blessings. Though it is true that all which comes from the Father of Lights is light, the sorrows and troubles that He sends have the light terribly muffled in darkness, and it needs strong faith and insight to pierce through the cloud to see the gleam of anything bright beneath. But when we turn to this other region, and think of what comes to every poor, tremulous, human heart, that likes to take it through that Divine Spirit—the forgiveness of sins, the rectification of errors, the purification of lusts and passions, the gleams of hope on the future, and the access with confidence into the standing and place of children; oh, then surely we can say, ‘Blessed be God for spiritual blessings.’

But if the word which defines may thus seem to limit, the other word which accompanies it sweeps away every limit; for it calls upon us to bless God for *all* spiritual blessings. That is to say, there is no gap in His gift. It is rounded and complete and perfect. Whatever a man’s needs may require, whatever his hopes can dream, whatever his wishes can stretch out towards, it is all here, compacted and complete. The spiritual gifts are encyclopædial and all-sufficient.

They are not segments, but completed circles. When God gives He gives amply.

II. So much, then, for the first point; now, in the second place, note the one divine act by which all these blessings have been bestowed.

‘Blessed be God who *has* given’; or, still more definitely, pointing to some one specific moment and deed in which the benefaction was completed, ‘Blessed be God who gave.’

When? Well, ideally in the depths of His own eternal mind the gift was complete or ever the recipients were created to receive it, and historically the gift was complete in the act of redemption when He spared not His Own Son, but gave Him up unto the death for us all. A man may destine an estate for the benefit of some community which for generations long may continue to enjoy its benefits, but the gift is complete when he signs the deed that makes it over. Humphrey Chetham gave the boys in his school to-day their education when, centuries ago, he assigned his property to that beneficent purpose. So, away back in the mists of Eternity the gift was completed, and the signature was put to the deed when Jesus Christ was born, and the seal was added when Jesus Christ died. ‘Blessed be God who *hath* given.’

So, then, we may not only draw the conclusion which the Apostle drew, ‘how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?’ but we can draw an even grander one, ‘Has He not with Him also freely given us all things?’ And we possess them all to-day if our hearts are resting on Jesus Christ. The limit of the gift is only in ourselves. All has been given, but the question remains how much has been taken.

Oh, Christian men and women, there is nothing that

we require more than to have what we have, to possess what is ours, to make our own what has been bestowed. You sometimes hear of some beggar, or private soldier, or farm labourer, who has come all at once into an estate that was his, years before he knew anything about it. There is such a boundless wealth belonging by right, and by the Giver's gift, to every Christian soul; and yet, here are we, many of us, like the paupers who sometimes turn up in workhouses, all in rags, and with deposit-receipts for £200 or £300 stitched into the rags, that they get no good out of. Here are we, with all that wealth, paupers still. Be sure that you have what you have. Do you remember the exhortation to a valiant effort in one of the stories in the Old Testament—'Know ye that Ramoth-gilead is *ours*, and we take it not?' And that is exactly what is true about hosts of professing Christians who have not, in any real sense, the possession of what God has given them. It is well to ask, for our desires are the measures of our capacities. It is well to ask, but we very often ask when what is wanted is not that we should get more, but that we should utilise what we have. And we make mistakes therein, as if God needed to be besought to give, when all the while it is we who need to be stirred up to grasp and keep the things that are freely given to us of God.

III. In the next place, notice the one place where all these blessings are kept.

'Blessed be God who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places.' 'In heavenly places.' Now that does not merely define the region of origin, the locality where they originated or whence they come. It does do that, but it does a great deal

more. It does not merely tell us, as we often are disposed to think that it does, that 'every good and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down'—though that is perfectly true, but it means much rather that in order to get the gift we must go up. They are in the heavenly places, and they cannot live anywhere else. They have been sticking shrubs in tubs outside our public buildings this last week. How long will they keep their leaves and their freshness? How soon will they need to be shifted and taken back again to the sweeter air, where they can flourish? God's spiritual gifts cannot grow in smoke and dirt and a polluted atmosphere. And if a professing Christian man lives his life on the low levels he will have very few of the heavenly gifts coming down to him there. And that is the reason—the reason above all others—why, with such a large provision made for all possible necessities and longings of all sorts, people who call themselves Christians go up and down the world feeble and poor, and with little enjoyment of their religion, and having verified scarcely anything of the great promises which God has given them.

Brother, according to the old word with which the Mass used to begin, '*Sursum corda*'—up with your hearts! The blessings are in the heavens, and if we want them we must go where they are. It is not enough to drink sparing draughts from the stream as it flows through the plain. Travel up to the headwaters, where the great pure fountain is, that gushes out abundant and inexhaustible. The gifts are heavenly, and there they abide, and thither we must mount if we would possess them.

Now that this understanding of the words is correct I think is clearly shown by a verse in the next chapter,

where we find the very same phrase employed. In this connection the Apostle says that 'God hath raised us up together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.' That is to say, the true ideal of the Christian life is that, even here and now, it is a life of such intimate union and incorporation with Jesus Christ as that where He is we are, and that even whilst we tabernacle upon earth and move about amongst its illusions and changing scenes, in the depth of our true being we may be fixed, and sit at rest with Christ where He is.

Do not dismiss that as mere pulpit rhetoric. Do not say that it is mystical and incomprehensible, and cannot be reduced into practice amidst the distractions of daily life. Brethren, it is not so! Jesus Christ Himself said about Himself that He came down from heaven, and that though He did, even whilst He wore the likeness of the flesh, and was one of us, He was 'the Son of Man which is in Heaven,' when He lay in the manger, when He worked at the carpenter's bench in Nazareth, when He walked with weary feet those blessed acres, when He hung, for our advantage, on the bitter Cross. And that was no incommunicable property of His mysterious nature, but it was the typical example of what it is possible for manhood to be. And you and I, if we are to possess in any measure corresponding with the gift of Christ the spiritual blessing which God bestows, must have our lives 'hid with Christ in God,' and sit together with Him in the heavenly places.

IV. Lastly, note the one Person in whom all spiritual blessings are enshrined.

'In the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.' You cannot separate between Him and His gifts, neither in the way of getting Him without them, nor in the way of getting them without Him. They are Himself, and in

the deepest analysis all spiritual blessings are reducible to one—viz. that the Spirit of Jesus Christ Himself shall dwell with us.

Now, that union by which it is possible for poor, empty, sinful creatures to be filled with His fulness, animated with His life, strengthened with His omnipotence, and sanctified by His indwelling—that union is the very kernel of this Epistle to the Ephesians.

I dare say I have often drawn your attention to the singular emphasis and repetition with which that phrase ‘in Christ’ occurs throughout the letter. Just take the two or three instances of it that I gather as I speak. In this first chapter we read, ‘the faithful in Jesus Christ.’ Then comes our text, ‘blessings in heavenly places in Christ.’ Then, in the very next verse, we read, ‘chosen us in Him.’ Then, a verse or two after, we have ‘accepted in the Beloved,’ which is immediately followed by, ‘in whom we have redemption through His blood.’ Then, again, ‘that He might gather together in one all things in Christ, in whom also we have obtained the inheritance.’ I need not make other quotations, but throughout the letter every blessing that can gladden or sanctify the human spirit is regarded by the Apostle as being stored and shrined in Jesus Christ: inseparable from Him, and therefore to be found by us only in union with Him.

And that is the point of all which I want to say—viz. that, inasmuch as all spiritual blessings that a soul can need are hived in Him in whom is all sweetness, the way, and the only way, to get them is that we, too, should pass into Him and dwell in Jesus Christ. It is His own teaching: ‘I am the Vine, ye are the branches. Abide in Me. Separate from Me ye can do nothing,’ and get nothing, and are nothing.

Oh, brethren! it is well that all our treasures should be in one place. It is better that they should all be in One Person. And if only we will lay our poor emptiness by the side of His fulness there will pass over from that infinite abundance and sufficiency everything that we can require.

We abide in Him by faith, by meditation, by love, by submission, by practical obedience, and, if we are wise, the effort of our lives will be to keep close to that Lord. As long as we keep touch with Him we have all and abound. Break the connection by wandering away, in thought and desire, by indulgence in sin, by letting earthly passions surge in and separate us from Him—break the connection by rebellion, by making ourselves our own ends and lords, and it is like switching off the electricity. Everything falls dead. You cannot have Christ's blessing unless you take Christ.

And so, dear brethren, 'abide in Me and I in you.' There is nothing else that will make us blessed; there is nothing else that will meet all the circumference of our necessities; there is nothing else that will quiet our hearts, will sanctify our understandings. Christ is yours if 'ye are Christ's.' 'Of His fulness *have* all we received,' for it all became ours when we became His, and Christian growth on earth and heaven is but the unfolding of the folded graces that are contained in Him. We possess the whole Christ, but eternity is needed to disclose all the unsearchable riches of our inheritance in Him.

‘ACCORDING TO’—I.

‘According to the good pleasure of His will, . . . According to the riches of His grace.’—EPH. i. 5, 7.

THAT phrase, ‘according to,’ is one of the key-words of this profound epistle, which occurs over and over again, like a refrain. I reckon twelve instances of it in three chapters of the letter, and they all introduce one or other of the two thoughts which appear in the two fragments that I have taken for my text. They either point out how the great blessings of Christ’s mission have underlying them the divine purpose, or they point out how the process of the Christian life in the individual has for its source and measure the abundances, the wealth of the grace and the power of God. So in both aspects the facts of earth are traced up to, and declared to be, the outcome of the heavenly depths, and that gives solemnity, grandeur, elevation, to this epistle all its own. We are carried, as it were, away up into the recesses of the mountains of God, and we look down upon the unruffled, mysterious, deep lake, from which come the rivers that water all the plains beneath.

Now of these two types of reference to the divine will and the divine wealth, I should like to gather together the instances, as they occur in this letter, in so far as I can, in the course of a sermon, touching them, it must be, very imperfectly. But I fear that it is impossible to deal with both the phases of this ‘according to,’ in one discourse. So I confine myself to that which is suggested by the first of our two texts, in the hope that some other day we may be able to overtake the other. So then, we have set

before us here the Christian thought of the divine will which underlies, and therefore is manifest by, the work of Jesus Christ, in its whole sweep and breadth. And I just take up the various instances in which this expression occurs in a great variety of forms, but all retaining substantially the same meaning.

I. Note that that divine will which underlies and is operative in, and therefore is certified to us by the whole work of Jesus Christ, in its facts and its consequences, is a 'good pleasure.'

Now there are few thoughts which the history of the world has shown to be more productive of iron and steel in the human character than that of the sovereign will of God. That made Islam, and is the secret of its power to-day, amidst its many corruptions. Because these wild desert tribes were all stiffened, or I might say inflamed, by that profound conviction, the sovereign will of God, they came down like a hammer upon that corrupt so-called Christian Church, and swept it off the face of the earth, as it deserved to be swept. And the same thought of the sovereign will, of which we are but instruments—pawns on its chess-board—made the grand seventeenth century Puritanism in England, and its sister type of men and of religion in Holland. For this is a historically proved thesis, that there is nothing which so contributes to the formation, and valuation of, and the readiness to die for, civil liberty, as the firm grasp of that thought of the divine sovereignty. Just because a man realises that the will of God is supreme over all the earth, he rebels against all forms of human despotism.

But with all the good that is in that great thought—and the Christianity of this day sorely wants the strength that might be given it by the exhibition of

that steel medicine—it wants another, ‘the good pleasure of His will.’ And that word, ‘good pleasure,’ does not express, as I think, in Paul’s usage of it, the simple notion of sovereignty, but always the notion of a benevolent sovereignty. It is ‘the good pleasure’—as it is put in another place by the same Apostle—‘of His goodness.’ And that thought, let in upon the solemnity and severity of the other one, is all that it needs in order to make the man who grasps it not only a hero in conflict, and a patient martyr in endurance, but a child in his Father’s house, rejoicing in the love of his Father everywhere and always.

Paul would have us believe that if we will take the work of Jesus Christ in the facts of His life, and its results upon humanity, as our horn-book and lesson, we shall draw from that some conceptions of the great thing that underlies it, ‘the good pleasure of His will.’ We stand in front of this complex universe, and some of us say: ‘Law’; and some of us say: ‘A Lawgiver behind the law; a Person at the heart of all things’; but unless we can say: ‘And in the heart of the Person a will, which is the expression of a steadfast, omnipotent love,’ then the world seems to me to be a place of unsolvable riddles and a torture-house. There goes the great steam-roller along the road. Everybody can see that it crushes down, and makes its own path. Who drives it? The steam in the boiler, or is there a hand on the lever? And what drives the hand? Christianity answers, and answers with unfaltering lip, rising clear above contradictions apparent and difficulties real, ‘The good pleasure of His will,’ and there men can rest.

Then there is another step. Another form in which this ‘according to’ appears in this letter is, if we adopt

the rendering, which I am disposed to do in the present case, of the Authorised Version rather than of the Revised, ‘according to His good pleasure . . . which He hath purposed in Himself.’ The Revised Version says, ‘Which He hath purposed in Him,’ and that is a perfectly possible rendering. But to me the old one is not only more eloquent, but more in accordance with the connection. So I venture to accept it without further ado—‘His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself.’

That brings us into the presence of that same great thought, which in another aspect is expressed in saying ‘His name is Jehovah,’ and in yet another aspect is expressed in saying ‘God is love,’ viz. the thought which sounds familiar, but which has in it depths of strength and illumination and joy, if we rightly ponder it, that, to use human words, the motive of the divine action is all found within the divine nature.

We love one another because we discern, or think we discern, lovable qualities in the being on whom our love falls. God loves because He is God. That great artesian fountain wells up from the depths, by its own sweet impulse, and pours itself out; and ‘the good pleasure of His goodness’ has no other explanation than that it is His nature and property to be merciful. And so, dear brethren, we get clean past what has sometimes been the misapprehension of good people, and has oftener been the caricatured representation of Evangelical truth which its enemies have put forth—that God was made to love and pity by reason of the sacrifice of the Son, whereas the very opposite is the case. God loves, therefore He sent His Son, ‘that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but

have everlasting life,' and the notion of the Cross of Christ as changing the divine heart is as far away from Evangelical truth as it is from the natural conceptions that men form of the divine nature. We shake hands with our so-called antagonists and say, 'Yes! we believe as much as you do that God does not love us because Christ died, but we believe what perhaps you do not, that Christ died because God loves us, and would save us.' 'The good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself.'

Then, still further, there is another aspect of this same divine will brought out in other parts of this letter, of which this is a specimen, 'Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fulness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ,' which, being turned into more modern phraseology, is just this—that the great aim of that divine sovereign will, self-originated, full of loving-kindness to the world, is to manifest to all men what God is, that all men may know Him for what He is, and thereby be drawn back again, and grouped in peaceful unity round His Son, Jesus Christ. That is the intention which is deepest in the divine heart, the desire which God has most for every one of us. And when the Old Testament tells us that the great motive of the divine action is for 'My own Name's sake,' that expression might be so regarded as to disclose an ugly despot, who only wants to be revered by abject and submissive subjects. But what it really means is this, that the divine love which hovers over its poor, prodigal children because it is love, and, therefore, lovingly delights in a loving recognition and response, desires

most of all that all the wanderers should see the light, and that every soul of man should be able to whisper, with loving heart, the name, 'Abba! Father!' Is not that an uplifting thought as being the dominant motive which puts in action the whole of the divine activity? God created in order that He might fling His light upon creatures, who should thereby be glad. And God has redeemed in order that in Jesus Christ we might see Him, and, seeing Him, be at rest, and begin to grow like Him. This is the aim, 'That they might know Thee, the only true God . . . whom to know is eternal life.' And so self-communication and self-revelation is the very central mystery of the will.

But that is not all. Another of the forms in which this phrase occurs tells us that that great purpose, the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord, was that, 'Now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known' by the Church 'the manifold wisdom of God.' And so we get another thought, that that whole work of redemption, operated by the Incarnation, and culminating in the Crucifixion and Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ, stands as being the means by which other orders of creatures, besides ourselves, learn to know 'the manifold wisdom of God.' According to the grand old saying, at Creation the 'morning stars sang together for joy.' All spiritual creatures, be they 'higher' or 'lower,' can only know God by the observation of His acts.

'Twas great to speak a world from nought,
'Tis greater to redeem,'

and the same angelic lips that sang these praises on the morning of Creation have learnt a new song

that they sing: 'Glory and honour and dominion and power be unto the Lamb that was slain.'

Thus to principalities and powers, a diviner height in the loftiness, and a diviner depth in the condescension, and a diviner tenderness in the love, and a diviner energy in the power, of the redeeming God have been made known, and this is the thought of His eternal purpose. And that brings me to another point which is involved in the words that I have just quoted, which stand in connection with those that I have previously referred to. The phrase 'eternal purpose' literally rendered is, 'the purpose of the ages,' and that, no doubt, may mean 'eternal' in the sense of running on through all the ages; or it may mean, perhaps, that which we usually attach to the word 'eternal,' viz. unbeginning and unending. I take the former meaning as the more probable one, that the Apostle contemplates that great will of God which culminates in Jesus Christ, as coming solemnly sweeping through all the epochs of time from the beginning. In a deeper sense than the poet meant it, 'Through the ages an increasing purpose runs,' and that binds the epochs of humanity together—'the purpose of God in Christ Jesus.' The philosophy of history lies there, and it is a true instinct that makes the cradle at Bethlehem the pivot around which the world's chronology revolves. For the deepest thing about all the ages on the further side of it is that they are 'Before Christ,' and the formative fact for all the ages after it is that they are *Anno Domini*.

And now the last thing that is suggested by yet another of these eloquent expressions is deduced from another part of the same phrase. The purpose of the ages is described as that which 'He purposed in Christ

Jesus our Lord.’ Now the word ‘purposed’ literally is ‘made.’ And it may be a question whether ‘purposed’ or ‘accomplished’ is the special meaning to be attached to the general word ‘made.’ Either is legitimate. I take it that what the Apostle means here is that the purpose of God, which we have thus seen as sovereign, self-originated, having for its great aim the communication to all His creatures of the knowledge of Himself, and running through the ages, and binding them into a unity, reaches its entire accomplishment in the Cradle, and the Cross, and the Throne of Jesus Christ our Lord.

He fulfils the divine intention. There is that one life, and in that life alone of humanity you have a character which is in entire sympathy with the divine mind, which is in full possession of the divine truth, which never diverges or deviates by a hair's-breadth from the divine will, which is the complete and perfect exponent to man of the divine heart and character; and that Christ is the fulfilment of all that God desired in the depths of eternity, and the abysses of His being. Did He will that men should know Him? Christ has declared Him. Did He will that men should be drawn back to Him? Christ lifted on the Cross draws all men unto Him. Was it ‘according to the good pleasure of His goodness’ that we men should attain to the adoption of sons? By that Son we too became sons. Was it the purpose of His will that we should obtain an ‘inheritance’? We obtain it in Jesus Christ, ‘being heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.’ All that God willed to do is done. And when we look, on the one hand, up to that infinite purpose, and on the other, to the Cross, we hear from the dying lips, ‘It is

finished !' The purpose of the ages is accomplished in Christ Jesus.

Is it accomplished with you? I have been speaking about the divine counsel which is a 'good pleasure,' which runs through the whole history of mankind. But it is a divine purpose that you can thwart as far as you are concerned. 'How often would I have gathered . . . and ye would not,' and your 'would not' neutralises His 'would.' Do not stand in the way of the steam-roller. You cannot stop it, but it can crush you. Do not have Him say about you, 'In vain have I smitten, in vain have I loved.' Bow, accept, recognise that all God's armoury is brought to bear upon each of us in that great Cross and Passion, in that great Incarnation and human life. And I beseech you, in your hearts, let the will of God be done even as for a world it has been done by the sacrifice of Calvary.

'ACCORDING TO'—II.

'According to the riches of His grace.'—EPH. I. 7.

WE have seen, in a previous sermon, that a characteristic note of this letter is the frequent occurrence of that phrase 'according to.' I also then pointed out that it was employed in two different directions. One class of passages, with which I then tried to deal, used it to compare the divine purpose in our salvation with the historical process of the salvation. The type of that class of reference is found in a verse just before my text, 'according to the good pleasure of His will.' There is a second class of passages to which our text belongs, where the comparison is not between the

purpose and its realisation, but between the stores of the divine riches and the experiences of the Christian life. The one set of passages suggests the ground of our salvation in the deep purpose of God; the other suggests the measure of the power which is working out that salvation.

The instances of this second use of the phrase, besides the one in my text, 'according to the riches of His grace,' are such as these: 'According to the riches of His glory'; 'According to the power that worketh in us'; 'According to the measure of the gift of Christ'; 'According to the energy of the might of His power, which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead.'

Now it is clear that all these are varying forms of the same thing. They vary in form, they are identical in substance. What a Jew calls a 'cubit' an Englishman calls a 'foot,' but the result is pretty nearly the same. Shillings, marks, francs, are various standards; they all come to substantially the same result. These varying measures of the divine gift which is at work in man's salvation, have this in common, that they all run out into God's immeasurable, unlimited power, boundless wealth. And so, if we gather them together, and try to focus them in a few words, they may help to widen our conceptions of what we ought to expect from God, to bow us in contrition as to the small use that we have made of it, and to open our desires wide, that they may be filled.

I only aspire, then, to deal with these four forms which I have already suggested.

I. The measure of our possible attainments is the whole wealth of God.

'According to the riches of His grace.' Another

angle at which the same thought is viewed appears in another part of the letter, where we have this variation in the expression, 'According to the riches of His glory.' 'Grace' and 'Glory' are generally opposed antithetically; in this epistle they are united, for in the verse before my text I read: 'To the praise of the glory of His grace.' So the first thought is, the whole wealth of God is available for every Christian soul.

Now it seems to me that there are very few things that the popular Christianity of this day needs more than a furnishing up of the familiar old Christian terminology, which has largely lost the freshness and the power that it once had. They tell us that these incandescent burners, that we are using nowadays, are very much more bright when they are first fixed than after the mantle gets a little worn. So it is with the terminology of Christianity. It needs to be re-stated, not in such a way as to take the pith out of it, which is what a great deal of the modern craze for re-statement means, but in such a way as to brighten it up again, and to invest it with something of the 'celestial light' with which it was 'apparelled' when it first came. Now that word 'grace,' I have no doubt, sounds to you hard, theological, remote. But what does it mean? It gathers into one burning point the whole of the rays of that conception of God, with which it is the glory of Christianity to have flooded and drenched the world. It tells us that at the heart of the universe there is a heart; that God is Love, that that love is the motive-spring of His activity, that it comes and bends over the lowliest with a smile of amity on its lips, with healing and help in its hands, with forgiveness for all sins against itself, with boundless wealth for the

poorest, and that the wealth of His self-communicating love is the measure of the wealth that each of us may possess.

God gives 'according to the riches of His grace.' You do not expect a millionaire to give half-a-crown to a subscription fund; and God gives royally, divinely, measuring His bestowments by the abundance of His treasures, and handing over with an open palm large gifts of coined money, because there are infinite chests of uncirculated bullion in the deep storehouses. 'How great is Thy goodness which Thou hast manifested before the sons of men for them that fear Thee. How much greater is Thy goodness which Thou hast laid up in store.' But whilst He gives all, the question comes to be: What do I receive? The measure of His gift is His measureless grace; the measure of my reception is my—alas! easily-measured faith. What about the unearned increment? What about the unrealised wealth? Too many of us are like some man who has a great estate in another land. He knows nothing about it, and is living in grimy poverty in a back street. For you have all God's riches waiting for you, and 'the potentiality of wealth beyond the dreams of avarice' at your beck and call, and yet you are but poorly realising your possible riches. Alas, that when we might have so much we do have so little. 'According to the riches of His grace' He gives. But another 'according to' comes in. 'According to thy faith be it unto thee.' So we have to take these two measures together, and the working limit of our possession of God's riches comes out of the combination of them both.

Let me remind you, before I pass on, of what I have already suggested is but another phase of this same

thought. Paul says in this epistle that God gives not only 'according to the riches of His grace,' but 'according to the riches of His glory,' and that the latter expression is substantially identical with the former, is plain from the combination of the two in an earlier verse of this chapter: 'To the praise of the glory of His grace.' Thus we come to the blessed thought that the glory of God is essentially the revelation of that stooping, pitying, pardoning, enriching love. Not in the physical attributes, not in the characteristics of the divine nature which part Him off from men, and make Him remote, both from their conceptions and their affections, but in the love that bends to them is the true glory of God. All these other things are but the fringes; the centre of glory is the Love, which is the mightiest and the divinest thing in the Might Divine. The sunshine is far stronger than the lightning, and there is more force developed in the rain than in an earthquake. That truth is what Christianity has made the common possession of the world. It has thereby broken the chains of dread; it has bridged over the infinite distance. It has given us a God that can love and be loved, can stoop and can lift, can pardon and can purify. 'According to the good pleasure of His goodness,'—there is the foundation of our salvation. 'According to the riches of His grace,'—there is the measure of our salvation.

II. We have another form of the same measure in another set of verses which speak of the present working of God's power.

The Apostle speaks in regard to his own apostolic commission of its being given 'according to the working of His power'; and he speaks of all Christian men as receiving gifts 'according to the power that worketh

in us.' So there we have a standard that comes, as it were, a little closer to ourselves. We do not need to travel up into the dim abysses above, or think of the sanctities and the secrecies of that divine heart in the light which is inaccessible, but we have the measure in ourselves.

The standards of length are kept at Greenwich, the standards of capacity are kept in the Tower; but there are local standards distributed throughout the land to which men may go and have their measures corrected. And so besides all these lofty thoughts about the grace and the glory which measures His gift, we can turn within, if we are Christian people, and say, 'According to the power that worketh in us.'

Ah, brethren! there are few things that we want more than to revive and deepen the conviction that in every Christian man, by virtue of his faith, and in proportion to his faith, there is in operation an actual, superhuman, divine power moulding his nature, guiding, quickening, ennobling, lifting, confirming, and hallowing and shaping him into conformity with Jesus Christ. I would that we all believed not as a dogma, but realised as a personal experience, that irrefragable truth, 'Know ye not that the Spirit of Christ dwelleth in you, except ye be reprobate?' The life of self is evil; the life of Christ in self is good, and only good. And if you are Christian men, and in the proportion, as I have said, in which you are living by faith, you have working in your spirits the very Spirit of Christ Himself.

And that power is the measure of your possibilities. Obviously 'the power that worketh in us' is able to do a great deal more than it is doing in any of us. And so with deep significance the Apostle, side by side with his adducing of this power as being the measure of our

possible attainments, speaks about God as being 'able to do for us, exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think.' 'The power that works in us' transcends in its possibilities our present experience, it transcends our conceptions, it transcends our desires. It is able to do everything; it actually does—well, you know what it does in you. And the responsibility of hampering and hindering that power from working out its only adequately corresponding results lies at our own doors. 'A rushing, mighty wind'—yes; and in myself a scarcely perceptible breathing, and often a dead calm, stagnant as in the latitudes on either side of the Equator, where, for long, dreary days, no freshening motion in the atmosphere is perceptible. 'A fire?'—yes; then why is my grate full of grey, cold ashes, and one little spark in the corner? 'A fountain springing into everlasting life?'—yes; then why in my basin is there so much scum and ooze, mud and defilement, and so little of the flashing and brilliant water? 'The power that works in us' is sorely hindered by the weakness in which it works.

III. In the third place another form of this measure is stated by the Apostle, 'According to the measure of the gift of Christ.'

That means, of course, the gift which Christ bestows. It is substantially the same idea as I have just been dealing with, only looked at from rather a different point of view. Therefore, I need not dwell upon its parallelism with what has just been occupying our attention, but rather ask you simply to consider one point in reference to it, and that is that, side by side with the reference to the gift of Christ as being the measure of our possible attainments, the Apostle enlarges on the Infinite variety of the shapes which that

one gift takes in different people. 'He gave some apostles, some prophets,' etc.; one man receiving according to this fashion, and another according to that, and to each of us the distribution is made 'according to the measure of the gift of Christ.' That is to say, it takes us all, the collective goodness and beauty of the whole community of saints, to approximate to the fulness of that gift, and all are needed in their different types and forms of excellence, sanctity and beauty, in order to set forth, even imperfectly, the richness and the manifoldness of His great gift. And so 'we all come'—there is a multiplicity—'unto the perfect man, the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ'—there is a unity in which the multiplicity inheres.

So try to get a little more of some different type of excellence than that to which you are naturally inclined. Seek, and consciously endeavour, to appropriate into your character uncongenial excellences, and be very charitable in your judgments of the different types of Christian conformity to Christ our Lord. The crystals that are set round a light do not quarrel with each other as to whether green, or yellow, or blue, or red, or violet is the true colour to reflect. We need all the seven prismatic tints to make the perfect white light. The gift of Christ is many-sided; try not to be one-sided in your reception of it.

IV. And now the last form of this measure is 'according to the energy of the might of His power, which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead.'

When we gazed upon the riches of God's grace, they were high above us, when we looked upon 'the power that worketh in us,' we saw it working amidst many hindrances and hamperings, but here there is presented

to us in a concrete example, close beside us, of what God can make of a man when the man is wholly pliable to His will, and the recipient of His influences. And so there stands before us the guarantee and the pattern of immortal life, the Christ whose Manhood died and lives, who is clothed with a spiritual body, who wields royal authority in the Kingdom of the Most High. And that is the measure of what God can do with me, and wishes to do with me, if I will let Him. Christ is my pattern, and the measure of my own possibilities.

To be with Him, where and what He is, is the only adequate result of the power that works in us, and of the process that is already begun in us, if we are Christian people. You are sometimes—there is one eminent example of it in that great Medicean Chapel at Florence—a statue exquisitely finished in all its limbs, but one part left in the rough. That is the best that Christian people come to here. Shall it always be so? Do not the very imperfections prophesy completion, and is it not certain that the half-finished torso will be carried to the upper workshop, and be there disengaged from the dead marble and made to stand out in perfect beauty and fullest completeness? Christ is the object of our hopes, and no hopes of the Christian life are adequate to the power that works in us, or to the progress already made, which do not see in the ‘energy of the might of the power’ which wrought in Christ, the example and the guarantee of the exceeding greatness of ‘His power which is to usward.’

And now, one last word. Besides all these passages which have been occupying us, there is another use of this same phrase in this letter which presents a very solemn and grim contrast. I can do no better with it

than simply read it: 'Ye were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh'—mark the allusion to the other words that we have been referring to—'in the children of disobedience.' So there you have the alternative, either 'dead in trespasses and sins,' whilst living the physical and the intellectual life, or partaking of the life of Him 'who was dead, and is alive for ever more'; either 'walking according to the course of this world,' which is 'disobedience' and 'wrath,' or walking 'according to the power that worketh in us'; either 'putting on,' or rather continuing to wear, 'the old man which is corrupt according to the lusts which deceive,' or 'putting on the new man, which according to God is created in righteousness and holiness and truth.' The choice is before us. May God help us to choose aright!

GOD'S INHERITANCE AND OURS

'In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, . . . the earnest of our inheritance.'—EPH. i. 11, 14.

A DEWDROP twinkles into green and gold as the sunlight falls on it. A diamond flashes many colours as its facets catch the light. So, in this context, the Apostle seems to be haunted with that thought of 'inheriting' and 'inheritance,' and he recurs to it several times, but sets it at different angles, and it flashes back different beauties of radiance. For the words, which I have wrenched from their context in the first of these two verses, are more accurately rendered, as in the Revised Version, in 'whom also we

were made,' *not* 'have obtained'—'an inheritance.' Whose inheritance? God's! The Christian community is God's possession. Then, in my second text, we have the converse thought—'the earnest of *our* inheritance. What is the Christian's possession? The same God whose possession is the Christian. So, then, there is a deep and a wonderful relation between the believing soul and God, and however different must be the two sides of that relation, the resemblance is greater than the difference. Surely that is the deepest, most blessed, and most strength-giving conception of the Christian life. Other notions of it lay stress, and that rightly, upon certain correspondence between us and God. My faith corresponds to His faithfulness and veracity. My obedience corresponds to His authority. My weakness lays hold on His strength. My emptiness is replenished by His fulness. But here we rise above the region of correspondences into that of similarity. In these other aspects the convexity fits the concavity; in this aspect the two hemispheres go together and make the complete globe. We possess God, and God possesses us, and it is the same set of facts which are set forth in the two thoughts, 'We were made an inheritance, . . . the earnest of our inheritance.'

I. Now, then, let me ask you to look first at this mutual possession.

We possess God; God possesses us. What does that mean? Well, it means plainly and chiefly this, a mutual love. For we all know—and many of us thankfully can bear witness to the truth of it in our earthly relationships,—that the one way by which a human spirit can possess a spirit is by the sweet mutual love which abolishes 'mine' and 'thine,' and all but abolishes 'me' and 'thee.' And so God sets little store by the

ownership which depends on divinity and creation, though, of course, that relation brings with it a duty. As the old psalm has it, 'It is He that hath made us, and we are His'; still, such a relationship as this, based upon the connection that subsists between the Maker and the work of His hands, is so purely external, and harsh, and superficial, that God does not reckon it to be a possession at all.

You perhaps remember how, in the great word which underlies all these New Testament conceptions of God's ownership of His people, viz. the charter that constituted Israel into a nation, He said, 'Ye shall be unto Me a people for a possession above all nations, for all the earth is Mine.' And yet, though that ownership and mastership extended over everything that His hands had made, He—if I might so say—contemned it, and relegated it to a secondary position, and told the people that His heart hungered for something deeper, more real, more vital than such a possession, and that therefore, just because all the earth was His, and that was not enough to satisfy His heart, He took them and made them a peculiar treasure above all nations. We have, then, to think of that great Divine Love which possesses us when He loves us, and when we love Him.

But remember that of this sweet commerce and reverberation of love which constitutes possession, the origination must be in His heart. 'We love Him because He first loved us.' The mirrors are set all round the great hall, but their surfaces are cold and lifeless until the great candelabrum in the centre is lit, and then, from every polished sheet there flashes back an echoing, answering light, and they repeat and repeat, until you scarce can tell which is the original

and which is the reflection. But quench the centre-light, and the daughter-radiances vanish into darkness. The love on either side is on one side spontaneous and underived, and on the other side is secondary and evoked, but it is love on both sides. His possession of us is, as it were, the upper side, and our possession of Him is, as it were, the underside of the one golden bond. It matters not whether you look at the stream with your face to its source or with your face to its mouth, the silvery plain is the same; and the deepest tie that knits men to God is the same as the tie that knits God to men. There is mutual possession because there is mutual love.

Then again, in this same thought of mutual possession there lies a mutual surrender. For to give is the life-breath of all true love, and there is nothing which the loving heart more desires than to be able to pour *itself* out—much rather than any subordinate gifts—on its object. But that, if it is one-sided, is misery, and only when it is reciprocal, is it blessed. God gives Himself to us, as we know, most chiefly in that unspeakable gift of His Son, and we possess Him by virtue of His self-communication which depends upon His love. And then we possess Him, and He possesses us, not less by the answering surrender of ourselves, which is the expression of our love. No love subsists if it is only recipient; no love subsists if it is only communicated. Exports and imports must both be realised in this sweet commerce, and we enrich ourselves far more by what we give to the Beloved than by what we keep for ourselves.

The last, the hardest thing to surrender, is our own wills. To give them up by constraint is slavery that degrades. To give them up because we love is a sacri-

fice which sanctifies, even in the lowest reaches of daily life. And the love that knits us to God is not invested with all its blessed possession of Him, until it has surrendered its will, and said, 'Not as I will, but as Thou wilt.' The traveller in the old fable gathered his cloak around him all the more closely, and held it the more tightly, because of the tempest that blew, but when the warm sunbeams fell he dropped it. He that would coerce my will, stiffens it into rebellion; but when a beloved one says, 'Though I might be much bold to enjoin thee, yet for love's sake I rather beseech,' then yielding is blessedness, and the giving ourselves away is the finding of God and ourselves.

I need not touch, in more than a word, upon another aspect of this mutual possession, brought into view lovingly in many parts of Scripture, and that is that there is in it not only mutual love and mutual surrender, but mutual indwelling. 'He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.' Jesus Christ has said the same thing to us, 'I am the Vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in Me bringeth forth much fruit.' We dwell in God, possessing Him; He dwells in us, possessing us. We dwell in God, being possessed by Him. He dwells in us, being possessed by us. And He moves in the heart that loves, as the Master walking through His house, as the divinity is present in the temple, and as the soul permeates the body, and is sight in the eye and colour in the cheek, and force in the arm, and deftness in the finger, and swiftness in the foot. So the indwelling God breathes through all the capacities, and all the desires, and all the needs of the soul which He inhabits, and makes them all blessed. The very same set of facts—the presence of a divine life in the life of the believing

spirit—may either be looked at from the lower end, and then they are that I possess God, and find in Him the nutriment and the stimulus for all my being, or may be looked at from the upper end, that He possesses me and finds in me capacities and a nature the emptiness of which He fills, and organs which He uses. In both cases mutual love, mutual surrender, mutual inhabitation, make up God's possession of me and my possession of God.

II. And now let me point you in a very few words to some of the plain, practical issues of this mutual possession. God's possession of us demands our consecration. 'Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price,' therefore, to live for self is to fly in the face of the very purpose of Christ's mission and of God's communication of Himself to us. There are slaves who run away from their masters and 'deny the Lord that bought them.' We do that whenever, being God's slaves, we set up anything else than His will as our law, or anything else than His glory as the aim of our lives. To live for self is to die, to die to self is to live. And the solemn obligations of that most blessed possession by God of us are as solemn as the possession is blessed, and can only be discharged when we turn to Him, and yield the whole control of our nature to His merciful hand, believing that He has not only the right to dispose of us, but that His disposition of us will always coincide with our sanest conceptions of good, and our wisest desires for happiness. Yield yourselves to God, for He has yielded Himself to you, and in the yielding we realise our largest and most blessed possession. It is a good bargain to give myself and to get God.

God's possession of us, not only demands consecration,

but it ensures safety. Remember that great word, 'No man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand.' God is not a careless owner who leaves His treasures to be blown by every wind, or filched by every petty robber. He is not like the king of some decrepit monarchy, slices of whose territory his neighbours are for ever paring off and annexing. What God has God preserves. 'He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.' 'They are Mine, saith the Lord, My jewels in the day which I make.' But our security depends on our consecration. 'No man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand.' No! But you can wriggle yourself out of your Father's hand, if you will. And the security avails only so long as you realise that you belong to God, and are living not for yourself.

Possessing God we are rich. There is nothing that is truly our wealth which remains outside of us, and can be separated from us. 'Shrouds have no pockets,' says the Spanish proverb. 'His glory shall not descend after him,' says the grim psalm. But if God possesses me He is not going to let His treasures be lost in the grave. And if I possess Him then I shall pass through death as a beam of light does through some denser medium—a little refracted indeed, but not broken up; and I shall carry with me all my wealth to begin another world with. And that is more than you can do with the money that you make here. If you have God, you have the capital to commence a new condition of things beyond the grave.

And so that mutual possession is the real pledge of immortal life, for nothing can be more incredible than that a soul which has risen to have God for its very own, and has bowed itself to accept God's ownership

of it, can be affected by such a transient and physical incident as what we call death. We rise to the assurance of immortality because we have an inheritance which is God Himself. And in that inexhaustible Inheritance there lies the guarantee that we shall live while He lives, because He lives, and until we have incorporated into our lives all the majesty and the purity and the wisdom and the power that belong to us because they are God's.

But we have to notice the two words that lie at the beginning of our first text—'*In whom* we were made an inheritance.' That opens up the whole question of the means by which this mutual possession becomes possible for us men. Jesus Christ has died. That breaks the bondage under which the whole world is held. For the true slavery which interferes with the free service and the full possession of God is the slavery of self and sin. Jesus Christ has died. 'If the Son make you free ye shall be free indeed.' That great sacrifice not only 'breaks the power of cancelled sin,' but it also moves the heart, in the measure in which we truly accept it, to the love and the surrender which make the mutual possession of which we have been speaking. And so it is in Him that we become an Inheritance, that God comes to His rights in regard to each of us. And it is in Him that we, trusting the Son, have the inheritance for ours, and 'are heirs with God, and joint heirs with Christ.' So, dear friends, if we would 'be meet for the inheritance of the saints in light,' we must unite ourselves to that Lord by faith, and through Him and faith in Him, we shall receive 'the remission of sins and inheritance among all them that are sanctified.'

THE EARNEST AND THE INHERITANCE

'The earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession.'—EPH. i. 14.

I HAVE dealt with a portion of this verse in conjunction with the fragment of another in this chapter. I tried to show you how much the idea of the mutual possession of God by the believing soul, and of the believing soul by God, was present to the Apostle's thoughts in this context. These two ideas are brought into close juxtaposition in the verse before us, for, as you will see if you use the Revised Version, the latter clause is there rightly paraphrased by the addition of a supplement, and reads 'until the redemption of God's own possession.' So that in the first clause we have 'our inheritance,' and in the second we have 'God's possession.' This double idea, however, has appended to it in this verse some very striking and important thoughts. The possession of both sides is regarded as incomplete, for what *we* have is the 'earnest' of the 'inheritance,' and 'God's own possession' has yet to be 'redeemed,' in the fullest sense of that word, at some point in the future. An 'earnest' is a fraction of an inheritance, or of a sum hereafter to be paid, and is the guarantee and pledge that the whole shall one day be handed over to the man who has received the foretaste of it in the 'earnest.' The soldier's shilling, the ploughman's 'arles,' the clod of earth and tuft of grass which, in some forms of transfer, were handed over to the purchaser, were all the guarantee that the rest was going to come. So the great future is sealed to us by the small present and the experiences of the Christian life

to-day, imperfect, fragmentary, defective as they are, are the best prophecy and the most glorious pledge of that great to-morrow. The same law of continuity which, in application to our characters, and our work, and our daily life, makes 'to-morrow as this day, and much more abundant,' in its application to the future life makes the life here its parent, and the life yonder the prolongation and the raising to its highest power, of what is the main though often impeded tendency and direction of the present. The earnest of the 'inheritance' is the pledge until the full redemption of 'God's own possession.' I wish, then, to draw attention to these additional thoughts which are here attached to the main idea with which we were dealing in the last sermon.

I. And I ask you to look with me, first, at the incompleteness of the present possession.

I tried to show in my last sermon how those great thoughts of God's having us, and our having God, rested upon the three ideas of mutual love, mutual communication, and mutual indwelling. On His side the love, the impartation, the indwelling, are all perfect. On our side they are incomplete, broken, defective; and, therefore, the incompleteness on our side hinders both God's possession of us, and our possession of Him; so that we have but the 'earnest' and not the 'inheritance.' That is to say, the ownership may be perfect in idea, but in realisation it is imperfect.

And then, if we turn to the word in the other clause, 'the redemption of the purchased possession,' that suggests the incompleteness with which God as yet owns us. For though the initial act of redeeming is complete, yet redemption is a process, and not an act. And we 'are having' it, as the Apostle says in another

place very emphatically, in continual and growing experience. The estate has been acquired, but has not yet been fully subdued. For there are tribes in the jungles and in the hills who still hold out against the reign of Him who has won it for Himself. And so seeing that the redemption in its fulness is relegated to some point in the future, towards which we are progressively approximating, and seeing that the best that can be said about the Christian experience here is that we have an 'earnest of the inheritance,' we must recognise the incompleteness to-day of our possession of God, and of God's possession of us.

That is a matter of experience. We know that only too well. 'I have God'—have I? I have a drop at the bottom of a too often unsteadily held and spilling cup, and the great ocean rolls unfathomable and boundless at my feet. How partial, how fragmentary, how clouded with doubts and blank ignorance, how intermittent, and, alas! rare, is our knowledge of Him. We sometimes go down our streets between tall houses, walking in their shadow, and now and then there is a cross street down which a blaze of sunshine comes, and when we reach it, and the houses fall back, we see the blue beyond. But we go on, and we are in the shadow again. And so our earthly lives are passed, to a large extent, beneath the shade of the grimy buildings that we ourselves have put up, and which shut out heaven from us, and only now and then a slanting beam comes through some opening, and carries wistful thoughts and longings into the Empyrean beyond. And how feeble our faith, and how little of His power comes into our hearts, and how little of the joy of the Lord is realised in our daily experience we all know, and it is sometimes good for us to force ourselves to feel it is

but an 'earnest' of the 'inheritance' that the best of us has.

'God has us.' Has He? Has He my will, which submits itself, and finds joy in submitting itself, to Him? How many competitors are there for my love which come in in front of Him, and we 'cannot get at Him for the press'! How many other motives are dominant in our lives, and how often we wrench ourselves away from our submission to Him, and try to set up a little dominion of our own, and say, 'Our lives are ours; who is lord over us?' Oh, brethren! we have God if we are Christians at all, and God has us. But alas! surely all honest experience tells us that there are awful gaps in the circle, and that our possession of Him, and His possession of us, are woefully incomplete.

Now, let me remind you that this incompleteness is mainly our own fault. Of course, I know that for the absolute completeness, either of my possession of God or of His of me, I must pass from out this world, and enter upon another stage and manner of being. But it is not being in the flesh, but it is being dominated by the flesh, that is the reason for the incompleteness of our mutual possession. And it is not being in the world, but it is being seduced and tyrannised over by the influx of worldly desires and thoughts, surging into our hearts, that drives God from out of our hearts, and draws us away from the sweet security of being possessed by, and living close to, Him. Death does a great deal for a man in advancing him in the scale of being, and in changing the centre of gravity, as it were, of this life. But there is no reason to believe that anything in death, or beyond it, will so alter the set and direction of his soul as that it will lead him into that

possession of God, and being possessed by Him, which he has not here. There are many of us who, if we were to die this instant, would no more have God for ours, or belong to God, than we do now. It is our fault if the circle is broken into so many segments, if the moments of mutual love, communion, and indwelling are so rare and interrupted in our lives. The incompleteness which is due to our earthly condition is nothing as compared with the incompleteness which is due to our own sin.

But this incompleteness is one which may be progressively diminished, and we may be tending moment by moment, and year by year, nearer and nearer, and ever nearer, to the unreachable ideal of the entire possession of, and being possessed by, our God. There is a continual process of redemption of 'God's own possession' going on if a Christian man is true to himself and to that Divine Spirit which is the 'earnest' of the 'inheritance.' Mark that in my text, as it stands in our Bibles, and reads 'until the redemption,' there seems to be merely a pointing onwards to a future epoch, but that, in the more accurate rendering which you will find in the Revised Version, instead of 'until' we have 'unto,' and that teaches us that the Divine Spirit, which in one aspect is the 'earnest of the inheritance,' is also operating upon men's hearts and minds so as to bring about the gradual completion of the process of redemption.

So, dear brethren, seeing that by our own faults the possession is incomplete, and seeing that in the incompleteness there is given to each of us, if we rightly use it, a mighty power which is working ever towards the completion, it becomes us day by day to draw into our spirits more and more of that divine influence, and to

let it work more fully upon the sins and faults which, far more than the body of flesh, or the connection with the world which it brings about, are the reasons for the incompleteness of the possession. We have, if we are wise, the task to discharge of daily enclosing, so to speak, more and more of the broad land which is all given over to us for our inheritance, but of which only so much as we fence in and cultivate, and make our own, is our own.

The incompleteness is progressively completed, and it is our work as much as God's work to complete it. For though in our text that redemption is conceived of as a divine act, it is not an act in which we are but passive. The air goes into the lungs, and that oxygenates the blood, but the lung has to inflate if the air is to penetrate all its vesicles. And so the Spirit which seals us unto the redemption of the possession has to be received, held, diffused throughout, and utilised by our own effort.

II. Now, secondly, notice the certainty of the completion of the incompleteness.

As I have already said, the clod of earth and the handful of grass, the servant's wages, the soldier's shilling, are all guarantees that the whole of the inheritance or of the pay will be forthcoming in due time. And so there emerges from this consideration of the Divine Spirit as the 'earnest,' the thought that the present experiences of a Christian soul are the surest proofs, and the irrefragable guarantees, of that perfect future. We ask for proofs of a future life. They may be very useful in certain states of mind, and to certain phases of opinion, but as it seems to me, far deeper than the region of logical understanding, and far more conclusive than anything that can be cast

into the form of a syllogism, is the experience of a soul which knows that God is its, and that it is God's. 'I think, therefore, I am,' said the philosopher. 'I have God; therefore I shall always be,' says the Christian. Whilst that evidence is available only for himself, it is absolutely conclusive for himself. And the fact that it does spring in the hearts which are purest, because nearest God, is no small matter to be considered by men who may be groping for proofs of a life to come. If the selected moments of the purest devotion here on earth bring with them inevitably the confidence of the unending continuance of that communion, then those who do not believe in that future have to account for the fact as best they may. As for us who do know, though brokenly, and by reason of our own faults very imperfectly, what it is to have God, and be had by Him, we do not need to travel out to dim and doubtful analogies, nor do we even depend entirely upon the fact of a risen Christ ascended to the heavens, and living evermore, but we can say, 'I am God's; God is mine, and death has no power over such a mutual possession.'

The very incompleteness adds strength to the assurance, for the facts of the Christian life are such as to demand, both by its greatness and by its littleness, by its loftiness and by its lapses into lowliness, by the floodtide of devotion that sometimes sweeps rejoicingly over the mud-shoals and by the ebb that sometimes leaves them all black and festering, a future life wherein what was manifestly meant to be, and capable of being, dominant, supreme, but was hampered and hindered here, shall reach its full development, and where the plant that was dwarfed in this alien soil, transplanted into that higher house, shall blossom and

bear immortal fruits. The new moon has a ragged edge, and each of the protrusions and concavities are the prophecy of the perfect orb which shall ere long fill the night with calm light from its silvery shield. The incompleteness prophesies completion.

And if the incompleteness is so blessed, what will the completeness be? A shilling to a million pounds, Knowledge which is partial and intermittent, like the twilight, as contrasted with the blaze of noonday, Joy like winter sunshine as compared with the warmth and heat of the midday sun at the zenith on the Equator. The 'earnest' of the 'inheritance' is wealth; the inheritance itself shall be unaccountable treasure.

III. And so, lastly, a word about the completion of the possession.

The 'earnest' is always of the same nature as, and a part of the 'inheritance.' Therefore, since the Holy Spirit is the earnest, the conclusion is plain, that the inheritance is nothing less than God Himself. Heaven is to possess God, and to be possessed by Him. That is the highest conception that we can form of that future life. And it is sorely to be lamented that subsidiary conceptions, which are all useful in their subordinate places, have, by popular Christianity, been far too much elevated into being the central blessedness of that future heaven. It is all right that we should cast the things which it is 'impossible for men to utter' into the shape of symbols which may a little relieve the necessary inarticulateness; but golden streets, and crystal pavements, and white robes, and golden palms, and all such representations, are but the dimmest shadows of that which they intend to express, and do often, as is the vice of all symbols, obscure. We can only conceive of a condition of which we have

had no experience, by the two ways of symbolism and of negation. We can say, 'There shall be no night there; there shall be no curse there; they need no candle, neither light of the sun; they rest not day nor night; there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away.' But all these negations, like their sister symbols, are but surface work, and we have to go deeper than all of them.

But to possess God, and to be possessed by Him, and in either case fully, perfectly in degree, progressively in measure, eternal in duration, is the Heaven of heaven.

If that is the true conception of the inheritance, then it follows indubitably that such a Heaven is not for everybody. God would fain have us all for His there, as He would fain have each of us here and now, but it may not be. There are creatures which live beneath stones, and if you turn their coverings up, and let light fall on them, it kills them. And there are men who have refused to belong to God here, and refused to claim their portion in Him, and such cannot possess that true Heaven which is God Himself. Then, if its possession is not a mere matter of divine volition, giving a man what he is not capable of receiving, it plainly follows that the preparation must begin now and here by the incomplete possession of which my text is discoursing. And the way of such preparation is plain. The context says: 'In whom, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise.' Faith in Jesus Christ, and trust in Him and His work as my forgiveness, my acceptance, my changed nature and heart—is the condition of being 'sealed' with that Spirit whose sealing of us is the condition of

our love, our surrender, and mutual indwelling, which are our possession of God and being possessed by Him, and are the condition of our future complete possession of the 'inheritance.' We must begin with faith in Christ. Then comes the sealing, then comes the earnest, then comes the growing redemption, and in due time shall come the fulness of the possession. 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ' if thou wouldst have the earnest, whilst thou dost tabernacle in tents in the wilderness of Time, and if thou wouldst have the inheritance when thou crossest the flood into the goodly land.

THE HOPE OF THE CALLING

'That ye may know what is the hope of His calling.'—EPH. I. 12.

A MAN'S prayers for others are a very fair thermometer of his own religious condition. What he asks for them will largely indicate what he thinks best for himself; and how he asks it will show the firmness of his own faith and the fervour of his own feeling. There is nothing colder than the intercession of a cold Christian; and, on the other hand, in no part of the fervid Apostle Paul's writings do his words come more winged and fast, or his spirit glow with greater fervour of affection and holy desire than in his petitions for his friends.

In that great prayer, of which my text forms a part, we have his response to the good news that had reached him of the steadfastness in faith and abundance in love of these Ephesian Christians. As the best expression of his glad love he asks for them the knowledge of three things, of which my text is the

first, and the other two are the 'riches of the glory of the inheritance' and 'the exceeding greatness of God's power.'

Now if we take the 'hope' in my text, as is often done, as meaning the thing hoped for, there seems to be but a shadowy difference between the first and the second of these subjects of the apostolic petition. Whereas, if we take it as meaning, not the object on which the emotion is fixed, but the emotion itself, then all the three stand in a natural gradation and connection. We have, first, the Christian emotion; then the object upon which it is fixed; 'the glory of the inheritance'; then the power by which the latter is brought and the former is realised. We shall consider the second and third of these petitions in following sermons. For the present I confine myself to this first, the Apostle's great desire for Christians who had already made considerable progress in the Christian life, 'that they may know,' by experiencing it, 'what is the hope of His calling.'

I. Now the first thought that these words suggest to me is this, that the Christian hope is based upon the facts of Christian experience.

What does the Apostle mean by naming it 'the hope of his calling'? He means this, that the great act of the divine mercy revealed to us in the Gospel, by which God summons and invites men to Himself, will naturally produce in those who have yielded to it a hope of immortal and perfect life. Because God has called men, therefore the man who has yielded to the call may legitimately, and must, if he is to do his duty, cherish such a hope. It is clear enough that this is so, inasmuch as, unless there be a heaven of completeness for us who have yielded to the summons and

obeyed the invitation of God in His Gospel, His whole procedure is enigmatical and bewildering. The fact of the call is inexplicable; the cost of it is no less so. It was not worth while for God to make the world unless with respect to another which was to follow. It is still less worth His while to redeem the world if the results of that redemption, as they are exhibited here and now, and as they are capable of being exhibited in this present condition of things, are all that are to flow from it. It was not worth Christ's while to die, it was not worth God's while to send His Son, there was no sense or consistency in that great voice that echoes from heaven, calling us to love and serve Him, unless, beyond the jangling contradictions, and imperfect attainments, and foiled aspirations, and fragmentary faith, and broken services of earth, there be a region of completeness where all that was tendency here shall have become effect; and all that was but in germ here, and sorely frostbitten by the ungenial climate, and shrivelled by the foul vapours in the atmosphere, shall blossom and burgeon into eternal life. The Christian life, as it is to-day, in its attainments and imperfections, is at once the witness of the reality of the power that has produced it, and clamantly calls for a sphere and environment in which that power shall be able to produce the effects which it is capable of producing.

God is 'not a man that He should lie, nor the son of man that He should repent.' Men begin grand designs which never get further than the paper that they are drawn on; or they build a porch, and then they are bankrupt, or change their minds, or die, and the palace remains unrealised, and all that pass by mock and say, 'This man began to build and was

not able to finish.' But God's designs are certain of accomplishment. Unless we are to be reduced to a state of utter intellectual bewilderment and confusion, and forgo our belief in His veracity and resources to execute His designs, the design that lies in the calling must needs lead on to the realm of perfectness. If we consider the agent by which it is effected, even the risen Christ; if we consider the cost at which it was accomplished, even the death on the Cross, the mission of His Son, and His assumption of the limitations of an incarnate life; if we consider the manifest potencies of the power that He has brought into operation in the present Christian life; and if we consider, side by side with these, the stark, staring contradictions and as manifest inevitable limitations of the effects of that power, His calling carries in its depths the assurance that what He means shall be done, that Jesus Christ has not died in vain, that He has not ascended to fill a solitary throne, but is the Firstfruits of a great harvest; and that we shall one day be all that it is in the gospel of our salvation to make us, unhindered by the limitations and unthwarted by the antagonisms of this poor human life of ours. Unless there be a heaven in which all desires shall be satisfied, all evils removed, all good perfected, all ragged trees made symmetrical and full-grown, and all souls that love Him radiant with His own perfect image, then the light that seemed a light from heaven is the most delusive of all the marsh-fires of earth, and nothing in the illusions of sense or of men's cunning is so cruel or so tragic as the calling that seemed to be the voice of God, and summoned us to a heaven which was only a dream.

II. And so, secondly, notice how this hope of our text is in some sense the very topstone of the Christian life.

Paul has heard, concerning these people in Ephesus, of their faith and love. And because he has heard of these, therefore he brings this prayer. These two—the faith which apprehends the manifestation of God in Jesus Christ, and the love which that faith produces in the heart that accepts the revelation of the infinite love—are crowned by, and are imperfect without, and naturally lead on to the brightness of this great hope, Faith—the reliance of the spirit upon the veracity of the revealing God—gives hope its contents; for the Christian hope is not spun out of your own imaginations, nor is it the mere making objective in a future life of the unfulfilled desires of this disappointing present, but it is the recognition by the trusting spirit of the great and starry truths that are flashed upon it by the Word of God. Faith draws back the curtain, and Hope gazes into the supernal abysses. My hope, if it be anything else than the veriest will-o'-the-wisp and delusion, is the answer of my heart to the revealed truth of God.

Similarly the love which flows from faith not only necessarily leads on to the expectation of union being perfected with the object of its warm affection, but also so works upon the heart and character as that the false and seducing loves which draw away, like some sluice upon a river, the current of life from its true channel, are all sanctified and no more hinder hope. Loving, we hope for that which, unless we loved, would not draw desires nor yield foretastes of sweetness which, like perfumed oil, feed the pure flame of hope.

The triad of Christian graces is completed by Hope. Without her fair presence something is wanting to the completeness of her elder sisters. The great Campanile at Florence, though it be inlaid with glowing marbles, and fair sculptures, and perfect in its beauty, wants the gilded, skyward-pointing pinnacle of its topmost pyramid; and so it stands incomplete. And thus faith and love need for their crowning and completion the topmost grace that looks up to the sky, and is sure of a mansion there.

Brethren, our Christianity is woefully imperfect unless faith and love find their acme, their outstretching completion, in this Christian hope. Do you seek to complete your faith and love by a living hope full of immortality?

III. Thirdly, notice how this hope is an all-important element in the Christian life.

The Apostle asks for it as the best thing that can befall these Ephesian Christians, as the one thing that they need to make them strong and good and blessed. There are many other aspects of desire for them which appear in other parts of this letter. But here all Christian progress is regarded as being held in solution and included in vigorous hope.

Why is the activity of hope thus important for Christian life? Because it stimulates effort, calms sorrows, takes the fascination out of temptations, supplies a new aim for life and a new measure for the things of time and sense.

If we lived, as we ought to live, in the habitual apprehension of the great future awaiting all real Christians, would it not change the whole aspect of life? The world is very big when it is looked at from any point upon its surface; but suppose it could be

looked at from the central sun, how large would it appear then? We can shift our station in like fashion, and then we get the true measure at once of the insignificance and of the greatness of life. This world means nothing worthy, except as an introduction to another. Not that thereby there will follow in any wise man contempt for the present, for the very same reference to the future which dwarfs the greatnesses and dwindles the sorrows, and almost extinguishes the dazzling lights of this present, does also lift it to its true significance and importance. It is the vestibule of that future, and that future is conditioned throughout by the results of the few years that we live here. An apprenticeship may be a very poor matter, looked at in itself; and the boy may say What is the use of my working at all these trivial things? but, since it is apprenticeship, it is worth while to attend to every trifle in its course, for attention to them will affect the standing of the man all his days.

Here and now we are getting ready for the great workshop yonder; learning the trick of the tools, and how to use our fingers and our powers, and, when the schooling is done, we shall be set to nobler work, and receive ample wages for the years here. Because that great 'to-morrow will be as this day' of earthly life, 'and much more abundant,' therefore it is no trifle to work amongst the trifles; and nothing is small which may tell on our condition yonder. The least deflection from the straight line, however acute may be the angle which the divergent lines enclose at the starting, and however small may seem to be the deviation from parallelism, will, if prolonged to infinity, have room between the two for all the stars.

and the distance between them will be that the one is in heaven and the other is in hell. And so it is a great thing to live amongst the little things, and life gains its true significance when we dwarf and magnify it by linking it with the world to come.

If we only kept that hope bright before us, how little discomforts and sorrows and troubles would matter! Life would become 'a solemn scorn of ills.' It does not matter much what kind of cabin accommodation we have if we are only going a short voyage; the main thing is to make the port. If we, as Christian people, cherish, as we ought to do, this great hope, then we shall be able to control, and not to despise but to exalt this fleeting and transient scene, because it is linked inseparably with the life that is to come.

IV. Lastly, this hope needs enlightened eyes.

The Apostle prays that God may give to these Ephesians 'the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him,' and then he adds, as the result of that gift, the desire that the Ephesian believers may have 'the eyes of their hearts enlightened.' That is a remarkable expression. It does not mean, as an English reader might suppose it to mean, that the affections are the agents by which this knowledge reaches us; but 'heart' is here used, as it often is in Scripture, as a general expression for the whole inward life, and all that the Apostle means is that, by the gift of the Divine Spirit of wisdom, a man's inner nature may be so touched as to be capable of perceiving and grasping the 'hope of the calling.'

Observe, too, the language, 'that ye may know the

hope.' How can you *know* a hope? How do you know any kind of feeling? By having it. The only way of knowing what is the hope is to hope, and this is only possible by dint of these eyes of the understanding being enlightened. For our inward nature, as we have it, and as we use it, without the touch of that Divine Spirit, is so engrossed with this present that the far-off blessedness to which my text refers has no chance of entering there. No man can look at something beside him with one eye, and at something half a mile off with the other. You have to focus the eye according to the object; and he who is gazing upon the near is thereby made blind to that which is afar off. If we go crawling along the low levels with our eyes upon the dust, then of course we cannot see the crown above.

We need more than the historical revelation of the light in order to enlighten the inward nature. There is many a man here now who knows all about the immortality that is brought to light by Jesus Christ just as well as the Christian man whose soul is full of the hope of it, and who yet, for all his knowledge, does not know the hope, because he has not felt it. You have to get further than to the acceptance intellectually of the historical facts of a risen and ascended Saviour before there can be, in your heart, any vital hope of immortality. The inward eye must be cleared and strengthened, cross lights must be shut out so that we may direct the single eye of our hearts towards the great objects which alone are worthy of its fixed contemplation. And we cannot do that without a divine help, that Spirit of wisdom which will fill our hearts if we ask for it, which will fix our affections, which will clear our eyesight, which

will withdraw it from seeing vanity as well as give it reality to see.

But we must observe the conditions. Since this clearness of hope comes not merely from the acceptance as a truth of the fact of Christ's Resurrection and Ascension, but comes through the gift of that Divine Spirit, then to have it you must ask for it. Christian people, do you ask for it? Do you ever pray—I do not mean in words, but in real desire—that God would help you to keep steadily before you that great future to which we are all going so fast? If you do you will get the answer. Seek for that Spirit; use it, and do not resist its touches. Do not fix your gaze on the world when God is trying to draw you to fix it upon Himself. Think more about Jesus Christ, more about God's high calling, live nearer to Him, and try more honestly, more earnestly, more prayerfully, more habitually, even amidst all the troubles and difficulties and trivialities of each day, to cultivate that great faculty of joyful and assured hope.

Surely God did not endue us with the power of hoping that we might fling it all away on trivial, transient things. We are all far too short-sighted; our fault is not that we do not hope, but that we hope for such near things, for such small things, like the old mariners who had no compass nor sextant, and were obliged to creep timidly along the coasts, and steer from headland to headland. But we ought to launch boldly out into mid-ocean, knowing that we have before us that star that cannot guide us amiss. Do not set your hopes on the things that perish, for if you do, hopes fulfilled and hopes disappointed will be equally bitter in your mouths. And you older

people who, like myself, are drawing near the end of your days, and have little else left to hope for in this world, do you see to it that your anticipations extend 'above the ruinable skies.' *There* is an object beyond experience, above imagination, without example, for which the creation wants a comparison, we an apprehension, and the Word of God itself a sufficient revelation. 'It doth not yet appear what we shall be.' God hath called us to His eternal kingdom and glory; let us seek to walk in the light of the 'hope of His calling.'

GOD'S INHERITANCE IN THE SAINTS

'That ye may know what is the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.'—EPH. I. 18.

THE misery of Hope is that it so often owes its materials to the strength of our desires or to the activity of our imagination. But when mere wishes or fancies spin the thread, Hope cannot weave a lasting fabric. And so one of the old prophets, in speaking of the delusive hopes of man, says that they are like 'spiders' webs,' and 'shall not become garments.' Paul, then, having been asking for these Ephesian Christians that they might have hopes lofty and worthy, and such as God's summons to them would inspire, passes on to ask that they might have the material out of which they could weave such hope, namely, a sure and clear knowledge of the future blessings. The language in which he describes that future is remarkable—'the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.' He calls it God's inheritance, not as meaning that God is the Inheritor, but the Giver. He speaks of it as 'in

the saints,' meaning that, just as the land of Canaan was distributed amongst tribes and families, and each man got his own little plot, so that broad land is parted out amongst those who are 'partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.'

And so my text suggests to me three points to which I seek to call your attention. First, the inheritance; second, the heirs; and third, the heirs' present knowledge of their future possession.

I. First, then, note the inheritance.

Now we must discharge from the word some of its ordinary associations. There is no reference to the thought of succession in it, as the mere English reader is accustomed to think—to whom inheritance means possession by the death of another. The idea is simply that of possession. The figure which underlies the word is, of course, that of the ancient partition of the land of Canaan amongst the tribes, but we must go a great deal deeper than that in order to understand its whole sweep and fulness of meaning.

What is the portion for a soul? God. God is Heaven, and Heaven is God. No interpretation of 'the inheritance,' however it may run into cheap and vulgar sensuous descriptions of a future glory, has come within sight of the meaning of the word, unless it has grasped this as the central thought: 'Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee.' Only God can be the portion of a human spirit. And none else can fill the narrowest and the smallest of man's needs.

So, then, if there were realised all the accumulated changes of progress in blessedness, and the withdrawal of all external causes of disquiet and weariness and weeping, still the heart would hunger and be empty of

its true possession unless God Himself had flowed into it. It were but a poor advancement and the gain of a loss, if yearnings were made immortal, and the aching vacuity, which haunts every soul that is parted from God, were cursed with immortality. It would be so, if it be not true that the inheritance is nothing less than the fuller possession of God Himself.

And how do men possess God? How do we possess one another, here and now? By precisely the same way, only indefinitely expanded and exalted, do we possess Him here, and shall we possess Him hereafter. Heart to heart is joined by love which is mutual and interpenetrating possession; where 'mine' and 'thine' become blended, like the several portions of the one ray of white light, in the blessed word 'ours.' Contemplation makes us possessors of God. Assimilation to His character makes us own and have Him. They who love and gaze, and are being changed by still degrees into His likeness, possess Him. This is the central idea of man's future destiny and highest blessedness, a union with God closer and more intimate in degree, but yet essentially the same in kind, as is here possible amidst the shows and vanities and wearinesses of this mortal life. 'His servants shall serve Him, and see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads.' Obedience, contemplation, transformation, these are the hands by which we here lay hold on God; and they in the heavens grasp Him just as we here on earth may do. The 'inheritance' is God Himself.

Surely that is in accordance with the whole teaching of Scripture, and is but the expansion of plain words which tell us that we 'are heirs of God.' If that be so, then all the other subsidiary blessings which have

been, to the sore detriment of Christian anticipation and of Christian life in a hundred ways, elevated into disproportionate importance, fall into their right places, and are more when they are looked upon as secondary than when they are looked upon as primary.

Ah, brethren ! neither the sensuous metaphors which, in accommodation to our weakness, Scripture has used to paint that future so that we may, in some measure, comprehend it, nor the translation of these, in so far as they refer to circumstances and externals, are enough for us. It is blessed to know that 'there shall be no night there'—blessed to grasp all those sweet negatives which contradict the miseries of the world, and to think of no sin, no curse, no tears, no sighing nor sorrow, neither any more pain, 'because the former things have passed away.' It is sweet and ennobling to think that, when we are discharged of the load of this cumbrous flesh, we shall be much more ourselves, and able to see where now is but darkness, and to feel where now is but vacancy. It is blessed to think of the recognising of lost and loved ones. But all these blessednesses, heaped together, as it seems to me, would become sickeningly the same if prolonged through eternity, unless we had God for our very own. *Eternal* is an awful word, even when the noun that goes with it is *blessedness*. And I know not how even the redeemed could be saved, as the long ages rolled on, from the oppression of monotony, and the feeling, 'I would not live always,' unless God was 'the strength of their hearts, and their portion for ever.' We must rise above everything that merely applies to changes in our own natures and in our relations to the external universe, and to other orders of creatures ; and grasp, as the hidden sweetness that lies in the calyx of the

gorgeous flower, the possession of God Himself as the rapture of our joy and the heaven of our heaven.

And if that be so, then these accumulated words with which the Apostle, in his fiery, impetuous way, tries to set forth the greatness of what he is speaking about, receive a loftier meaning than they otherwise would have.

'The riches of the glory of His inheritance'—now that word 'riches,' or 'wealth,' is a favourite of Paul's; and in this single letter occurs, if I count rightly, five times. In addition to our text, it is used twice in connection with God's grace, 'the riches of His grace' once in connection with Jesus, 'the unsearchable riches of Christ'; and once in a similar connection to, though with a different application from, our text, 'the riches of His glory.' Always, you see, it is applied to something that is special and properly divine. And here, therefore, it applies, not to the abundance of any creatural good, however exuberant and inexhaustible the store of it may be, but simply and solely to that unwearying energy, that self-feeding and ever-burning and never-decaying light, which is God. Of Him alone it can be said that work does not exhaust, nor Being tend to its own extinction, nor expenditure of resources to their diminution. The guarantee for eternal blessedness is the 'riches' of the eternal God, and so we may be sure that no time can exhaust, nor any expenditure empty, either His storehouse or our wealth.

And again, the 'glory' is not the lustrous light, however dazzling to our feeble eyes that may be, of any creature that reflects the light of God, but it is the far-flashing and never-dying radiance of His own manifestation of Himself to the hearts and souls of them that love Him. And so the 'inheritance is incorruptible

and undefiled, and fadeth not away'; not merely by reason of the communicated will of God operating upon creatures whom He preserves untarnished by corruption, and ungnawed by decay, but because He Himself is the 'inheritance,' and on Him time hath no power. On His wealth all His creatures may hang for ever; and it shall be as it was in the sweet parable of the miracle of old, the fragments that remain will be more than when the meal began. 'The riches of the glory of His inheritance.'

II. Now notice, secondly, the heirs.

The words of my text receive, perhaps, their best commentary and explanation in those words which the writer of them heard, on the Damascus road, when the voice from heaven spoke to him about men 'obtaining an inheritance among them that are sanctified.' It almost sounds like an echo of that long past, but never-to-be-forgotten voice, when our Apostle writes as he does in our text.

Now what does he mean by 'saints'? Who are these amongst whom the broad acres of that infinite prairie are to be parted out? The word has attracted to itself contemptuous meanings and ascetical meanings, and meanings which really deny the true democracy of Christianity and the equality of all believers in the sight of God. But its scriptural use has none of these narrowing and confusing associations adhering to it, nor does it even directly and at first mean, as we generally take it to mean, pure men, holy in the sense of clean and righteous. But something goes before that phase of meaning, and it is this—a saint is a man separated and set apart for God, as His property. That is the true meaning of the word. It is its meaning as it is applied to the vessels of the Temple, the

priests, the services, and the altar. It is its meaning, only with the necessary substitution of spirit for body, as it is applied in the New Testament as a designation co-extensive with that of believers.

How does a man belong to God?

We asked a minute or two ago how God belonged to men. The answer to the converse question is almost identical. A man belongs to God by the affection of his heart, by the submission of his will, by the reference of his actions to Him; and he who thus belongs to God, in the same act in which he gives himself to God, receives God as his possession. The thing must be reciprocal. 'All mine is Thine'; and God answers, 'And all Mine is thine.' He ever meets our 'O Lord, I yield myself to Thee,' with His 'And My child, I give Myself to thee.' It is so in regard of our earthly loves. It is so in regard of our relations to Him. And that being the case, purity, which is generally taken by careless readers as being the main idea of sanctity, will follow this self-surrender, which is the basis of all goodness, everywhere and always.

If that be true, and I do not think it can be effectively denied, then the next step is a very plain one, and that is that for the perfect possession of God, which is heaven, the same thing is needed in its perfection which is required for the partial possession of Him that makes the Christian life of earth. And just as here we get Him for ours in proportion as we give up ourselves to be His, so yonder the inheritance belongs, and can only belong to, 'the saints.' So, then, one can see that there is nothing arbitrary in this limitation of a possession, which in its very nature cannot go beyond the bounds which are thus marked out for it. If heaven were the vulgar thing that some of you think

it, if that future life were desirable simply because you escaped from some external punishment and got all sorts of outward blessings and joys, felicities and advantages, hung round the neck, or pinned upon the breast, as they do to successful fighters, why then, of course, there might be partiality in the distribution of the decorations. But if that possession hinges upon our yielding ourselves to Him, then there is not an arbitrary link in the whole chain. Faith is set forth as the condition of heaven, because faith is the means of union with Christ, by and from whom alone we draw the motives for self-surrender and the power for sanctity. You cannot have heaven unless you have God. That is step number one. You cannot have God unless you have 'holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.' That is step number two. You cannot have holiness without faith. That is step number three. 'An inheritance among them that are sanctified'; and then there is added, 'by faith which is in Me.'

It is clear, too, what a fatal delusion some of us are under who think that we shall, and fancy that we should like to, as we say, 'go to heaven when we die.' Why, heaven is here, round about you, a present heaven in the imitation of God, in the practice of righteousness, in the cultivation of dependence upon Him, in the yielding of yourselves up to Him. Heaven is here, and by your own choice you stop outside of it. There must be a correspondence between environment and nature for blessedness. 'The mind is its own place,' as the great Puritan poet taught us, 'and makes a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.' Fishes die on the shore, and the man that drew them out dies in the water. Gills cannot breathe where lungs are useful, and lungs cannot, where gills come into play. If you

have not here and now the holiness which knits you to God, and gives you possession of Him, you would not like 'heaven,' if it were possible to carry you to that place, in so far as it is a place. It is rather strange, if you hope to go to heaven when you die, that you should be very unwilling to spend a little time in it whilst you are alive, and that you should expect blessedness then from that presence of God which brings you no blessedness now.

III. Lastly, we have here the heirs' present knowledge of their future blessedness.

The Apostle asks that these men may know a thing that clearly seems unknowable. It is an impossible petition, we might be ready to say, because it is clear enough that there can be no true knowledge of the conditions and details of that future life. The dark mountains that lie between us and it hide their secret well, and few or no stray beams have reached us. An unborn babe, or a chrysalis in a hole in the ground or in a chink of a tree, might think as wisely about its future condition as we can do about that life beyond. There can be no knowledge until there is experience.

What, then, does Paul mean by framing such a petition as this? The answer is found in noticing that the knowledge which he is imploring here is a consequence of a previous knowledge. For, in a former verse, he prays that these men may have 'the spirit of wisdom in the knowledge of God'; and when they have got the knowledge of God he thinks that they will have got the knowledge of 'the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.' Now, turn that into other words, and it is just this, that the knowledge of God, which comes by faith and love here, is in kind so identical with the fullest and loftiest

riches of the knowledge of Him hereafter, that, if we have the one, we are not without the other. The one is in germ, the other, no doubt, full blown; the one is the twinkling of the rushlight, as it were, the other is the blaze of the sunshine. The two states of being are so correspondent that from the one we draw our clearest knowledge of the other. There are telescopes, in using which you do not look up when you want to see the stars, but down on to a reflecting mirror, and there you see them. Such a reflecting mirror, though it be sometimes muddied and dimmed and always very small, are the experiences of the Christian soul here.

So, dear friends, if we want to know as much as may be known of the blessedness of heaven, let us seek to possess as much as may be possessed of the knowledge and love of God on earth. Then we shall know the centre, at any rate; and that is light, though the circumference may be very dark. Much will remain obscure. That is of very small consequence to Hope, which does not need information half so much as it needs assurance. Like some flower in the cranny of the rock, it can spread a broad bright blossom on little soil, if only it be firmly rooted.

The path for us all is plain. Come to Jesus Christ as sinful men, and take what He has given, who has given Himself for us. Touched by His love, let us love Him back again, and yield ourselves to Him, and He will give Himself to us. They who can say, 'O Lord! I am Thine,' are sure to hear from heaven, 'I am thine.' And they who possess, in being possessed by, God Himself, do not need to die in order to go to heaven, but are at least doorkeepers in the house of the Lord now, and stand where they can see into the

inner sanctuary which they will one day tread. A life of faith brings Heaven to us, and thereby gives us the surest and the clearest knowledge of what we shall be, and have, when we are brought to heaven.

THE MEASURE OF IMMEASURABLE POWER

'That ye may know . . . what is the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ,'—EPH. i. 19, 20.

'THE riches of the glory of the inheritance' will sometimes quench rather than stimulate hope. He can have little depth of religion who has not often felt that the transcendent glory of that promised future sharpens the doubt—'and can *I* ever hope to reach it?' Our paths are strewn with battlefields where we were defeated; how should we expect the victor's wreath? And so Paul does not think that he has asked all which his friends in Ephesus need when he has asked that they may know the hope and the inheritance. There is something more wanted, something more even for our knowledge of these, and that is the knowledge of the power which alone can fulfil the hope and bring the inheritance. His language swells and peals and becomes exuberant and noble with his theme. He catches fire, as it were, as he thinks about this power that worketh in us. It is 'exceeding.' Exceeding what? He does not tell us, but other words in this letter, in the other great prayer which it contains, may help us to supply the missing words. He speaks of the 'love of Christ which passeth knowledge,' and of God being 'able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think.' The power which is

really at work in Christian men to-day is in its nature properly transcendent and immeasurable, and passes thought and desire and knowledge.

And yet it has a measure. 'According to the working of the strength of the might which He wrought in Christ.' Is that heaping together of synonyms or all but synonyms, mere tautology? Surely not. Commentators tell us that they can distinguish differences of meaning between the words, in that the first of them is the more active and outward, and the last of them is the more inward. And so they liken them to fruit and branch and root; but we need simply say that the gathering together of words so nearly co-extensive in their meaning is witness to the effort to condense the infinite within the bounds of human tongue, to speak the unspeakable; and that these reiterated expressions, like the blows of the billows that succeed one another on the beach, are hints of the force of the infinite ocean that lies behind.

And then the Apostle, when he has once come in sight of his risen Lord, as is his wont, is swept away by the ardour of his faith and the clearness of his vision, and breaks from his purpose in order to dilate on the glories of his King. We do not need to follow him into that. I limit myself now to the words which I have read as my text, with only such reference to the magnificent passage which succeeds as may be necessary for the exposition of this.

I. So, then, I ask you to look, first, at the measure and example of the immeasurable power that works in Christian men.

'According to the working of the strength of the might which He wrought in Christ'—the Resurrection, the Ascension, the session at the right hand of

God, the rule over all creatures, and the exaltation above all things on earth or in the heavens—these are the facts which the Apostle brings before us as the pattern-works, the *chefs-d'œuvre* of the power that is operating in all Christians. The present glories of the ascended Christ are glories possessed by a Man, and, that being so, they are available as evidences and measures of the power which works in believing souls. In them we see the possibilities of humanity, the ideal for man which God had when He created and breathed His blessing upon him. It is one of ourselves who has strength enough to bear the burden of the glory, one of ourselves who can stand within the blaze of encircling and indwelling Divinity and be unconsumed. The possibilities of human nature are manifest there. If we want to know what the Divine Power can make of us, let us turn to look with the eye of faith upon what it has made of Jesus Christ.

But such a thought, glorious as it is, still leaves room for doubt as to my personal attainment of such an ideal. Possibility is much, but we need solid certainty. And we find it in the truth that the bond between Christ and those who truly love and trust Him is such as that the possibility must become a reality and be consolidated into a certainty. The Vine and its branches, their Head and the members, the Christ and His Church, are knit together by such closeness of union as that wheresoever and whatsoever the one is, there and that must the others also be. Therefore, when doubts and fears, and consciousness of our own weakness, creep across us, and all our hopes are dimmed, as some star in the heavens is, when a light mist floats between us and it, let us turn away to Him our brother, bone of our bone and flesh

of our flesh, and think that He, in His calm exaltation and regal authority and infinite blessedness, is not only the pattern of what humanity may be, but the pledge of what His Church must be. 'Where I am, there shall also My servant be.' 'The glory that Thou gavest Me I have given them.'

Nor is that all. Not only a possibility and a certainty for the future are for us the measure of the power that worketh in us, but as this same letter teaches us, we have, as Christians, a present scale by which we may estimate the greatness of the power. For in the next chapter, after that glorious burst as to the dignity of his Lord, which we have not the heart to call a digression, the Apostle, recurring to the theme of my text, goes on to say, 'And you hath He quickened,' and then, catching it up again a verse or two afterwards, he reiterates, clause by clause, what had been done on Jesus as having been done on us Christians. If that Divine Spirit raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, it is as true that the same power hath 'raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.' And so not only the far-off, though real and brilliant, and eye and heart-filling glories of the ascended Christ give us the measure of the power, but also the limited experience of the present Christian life, the fact of the resurrection from the true death, the death of sin, the fact of union with Jesus Christ so real and close as that they who truly experience it do live, as far as the roots of their lives and the scope and the aim of them are concerned, 'in the heavens,' and 'sit with Him in heavenly places'—these things afford us the measure of the power that worketh in us.

Then, because a Man is King of kings and Lord of lords; and because He who is our Life 'is exalted high above all principalities and powers'; and because from His throne He has quickened us from the death of sin, and has drawn us so near to Himself that if we are His we truly live beside Him, even whilst we stumble here in the darkness, we may know the exceeding greatness of His power, according to the working of the strength of the might which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead.

II. Secondly, notice the knowledge of the unknowable power.

We have already come across the same apparent paradox, covering a deep truth, in the former sections of this series of petitions. I need only remind you, in reference to this matter, that the knowledge which is here in question is not the intellectual perception of a fact as revealed in Scripture, but is that knowledge to which alone the New Testament gives the noble name, being knowledge verified by inward experience, and the result of one's own personal acquaintance with its object.

How do we know a power? By thrilling beneath its force. How are we to know the greatness of the power but because it comes surging and rejoicing into our aching emptiness, and lifts us buoyant above our temptations and weakness? Paul was not asking for these people theological conceptions. He was asking that their spirits might be so saturated with and immersed in that great ocean of force that pours from God as that they should never, henceforth, be able to doubt the greatness of that power which wrought in them. The knowledge that comes from experience is the knowledge that we all ought to seek. It is not

merely to be desired that we should have right and just conceptions, but that we should have the vital knowledge which is, and which comes from, life eternal.

And that power, which thus we may all know by feeling it working upon ourselves, though it be immeasurable, has its measure; though it be, in its depth and fulness, unknowable and inexhaustible, may yet be really and truly known. You do not need a thunderstorm to experience the electric shock; a battery that you can carry in your pocket will do that for you. You do not need to have traversed all the length and breadth and depth and height of some newly-discovered country to be sure of its existence, and to have a real, though it may be a vague, conception of the magnitude of its shores. And so, really, though boundedly, we have the knowledge of God, and can rely upon it as valid, though partial; and similarly, by experience we have such a certified acquaintance with Him and His power as needs no enlargement to be trusted, and to become the source of blessings untold. We may see but a strip of the sky through the narrow chinks of our prison windows, and many a grating may further intercept the view, and much dust that might be cleared away may dim the glass, but yet it is the sky that we see, and we can think of the great horizon circling round and round, and of the infinite depths above there, which neither eye nor thought can travel unwearied. Though all that we see be but an inch in breadth and a foot or two in height, yet we do see. We know the unknowable power that passeth knowledge.

And let me remind you of how large importance this knowledge of and constant reference to the

measureless power manifested in Christ is for us. I believe there can be no vigorous, happy Christian life without it. It is our only refuge from pessimism and despair for the world. The old psalm said, 'Thou hast crowned Him with glory and honour, and hast given Him dominion over the works of Thy hands,' and hundreds of years afterwards the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews commented on it thus, 'We see not yet all things put under Him.' Was the old vision a dream, was it never intended to be fulfilled? Apparently so, if we take the history of the past into account, and the centuries that have passed since have done nothing to make it more probable, apart from Jesus Christ, that man will rise to the height which the Psalmist dreamed of. When we look at the exploded Utopias that fill the past; when we think of the strange and apparently fatal necessity by which evil is developed from every stage of what men call progress, and how improvement is perverted, almost as soon as effected, into another fortress of weakness and misery; when we look on the world as it is to-day, I know not whence a man is to draw bright hopes, or what is to deliver him from pessimism as his last word about himself and his fellows, except the 'working of the strength of the might which He wrought in Christ.' 'We see not yet all things put under Him'—be it so, 'but we see Jesus,' and, looking to Him, hope is possible, reasonable, and imperative.

The same knowledge is our refuge from our own consciousness of weakness. We look up, as a climber may do in some Alpine ravine, upon the smooth gleaming walls of the cliff that rises above us. It is marble, it is fair, there are lovely lands on the summit, but nothing that has not wings can get there.

We try, but slip backwards almost as much as we rise. What is to be done? Are we to sit down at the foot of the cliff, and say, 'We cannot climb, let us be content with the luscious herbage and sheltered ease below?' Yes! That is what we are tempted to say. But look! a mighty hand reaches over, an arm is stretched down, the hand grasps us, and lifts us, and sets us there.

'No man hath ascended up into heaven save He that came down from heaven,' and having returned thither stoops thence, and will lift us to Himself. I am a poor, weak creature. Yes! I am all full of sin and corruption. Yes! I am ashamed of myself every day. Yes! I am too heavy to climb, and have no wings to fly, and am bound here by chains manifold. Yes! But we know the exceeding greatness of the power, and we triumph in Him.

That knowledge should shame us into contrition, when we think of such force at our disposal, and such poor results. That knowledge should widen our conceptions, enlarge our desires, breathe a brave confidence into our hopes, should teach us to expect great things of God, and to be intolerant of present attainments whilst anything remains unattained. And it should stimulate our vigorous effort, for no man will long seek to be better, if he is convinced that the effort is hopeless.

Learn to realise the exceeding greatness of the power that will clothe your weakness. 'Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, for that He is strong in might, not one faileth.' That is wonderful, but here is a far nobler operation of the divine power. It is great to 'preserve the ancient heavens' fresh and strong by His might, but it is

greater to come down to my weakness, to 'give power to the faint,' and 'increase strength to them that have no might.' And that is what He will do with us.

III. Lastly, notice the conditions for the operations of the power.

'To usward who believe,' says Paul. He has been talking to these Ephesians, and saying 'ye,' but now, by that 'us,' he places himself beside them, identifies himself with them, and declares that all his gifts and strength come to him on precisely the same conditions on which theirs do to them; and that he, like them, is a waiter upon that grace which God bestows on them that trust Him.

'To usward who believe.' Once more we are back at the old truth which we can never make too emphatic and plain, that the one condition of the weakest among us being strong with the strength of the Lord is simple trust in Him, verified, of course, by continuance and by effort.

How did the water go into the Ship Canal at Eastham last week? First of all they cut a trench, and then they severed the little strip of land between the hole and the sea, and the sea did the rest. The wider and deeper the opening that we make in our natures by our simple trust in God, the fuller will be the rejoicing flood that pours into us. There is an old story about a Christian father, who, having been torturing himself with theological speculations about the nature of the Trinity, fell asleep and dreamed that he was emptying the ocean with a thimble! Well, you cannot empty it with a thimble, but you can go to it with one, and, if you have only a thimble in your hand, you will only bring away a thimbleful. The measure of your faith is the measure of God's power given to you.

There are two measures of the immeasurable power—the one is that infinite limit, of ‘the power which He wrought in Christ,’ and the other the practical limit. The working measure of our spiritual life is our faith. In plain English, we can have as much of God as we want. We do have as much as we want. And if, in touch with the power that can shatter a universe, we only get a little thrill that is scarcely perceptible to ourselves, and all unnoticed by others, whose fault is that? If, coming to the fountain that laughs at drought, and can fill a universe with its waters, we scarcely bear away a straitened drop or two, that barely refreshes our parched lips, and does nothing to stimulate the growth of the plants of holiness in our gardens, whose fault is that? The practical measure of the power is for us the measure of our belief and desire. And if we only go to Him, as I pray we all may, and continue there, and ask from Him strength, according to the riches that are treasured in Jesus Christ, we shall get the old answer, ‘According to your faith be it unto you.’

THE RESURRECTION OF DEAD SOULS

‘God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ.’

EPH. II. 4, 5.

SCRIPTURE paints man as he is, in darker tints, and man as he may become, in brighter ones, than are elsewhere found. The range of this portrait painter’s palette is from pitchiest black to most dazzling white, as of snow smitten by sunlight. Nowhere else are there such sad, stern words about the actualities of human nature; nowhere else such glowing and won-

derful ones about its possibilities. This Physician knows that He can cure the worst cases, if they will take His medicine, and is under no temptation to minimise the severity of the symptoms or the fatality of the disease. We have got both sides in my text; man's actual condition, 'dead in trespasses'; man's possible condition, and the actual condition of thousands of men—made to live again in Jesus Christ, and with Him raised from the dead, and with Him gone up on high, and with Him sitting at God's right hand. That is what you and I may be if we will; if we will not, then we must be the other.

So there are three things here to look at for a few moments—the dead souls; the pitying love that looks down upon them; and the resurrection of the dead.

I. First, here is a picture, a dogmatic statement if you like, about the actual condition of human nature apart from Jesus Christ—'Dead in trespasses.'

The Apostle looks upon the world—many-coloured, full of activity, full of intellectual stir, full of human emotions, affections, joys, sorrows, fluctuations—as if it were one great cemetery, and on every gravestone there were written the same inscription. They all died of the same disease—'dead *through* sin,' as the original more properly means.

Now, I dare say many who are listening to me are saying in their hearts, 'Oh! Exaggeration! The old gloomy, narrow view of human nature cropping up again.' Well, I am not at all unwilling to acknowledge that truths like this have very often been preached both with a tone and in a manner that repels, and which is rightly chargeable with exaggeration and undue gloom and narrowness. But let me remind you that it is not the Evangelical preacher nor the Apostle

only who have to bear the condemnation of exaggeration, if this representation of my text be not true to facts, but it is Jesus Christ too; for He says, 'Except ye eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man, ye have no life in you.' And I think that be He divine or not divine, His words about the religious condition of men go so surely to the mark that a man must be tolerably impregnable in his self-conceit who charges *Him* with narrowness and exaggeration. At all events, I am content to say after Him, and I pray that you and I, when we accept Him as our Teacher, may take not only His gracious, but His stern, words, assured that a deep graciousness lies in these, too, if we rightly understand them.

Let me remind you that the phrase of my text is by no means confined to Christian teachers, but that, in common speech, we hear from all high thinkers about the lower type of humanity being dead to the loftier thoughts in which they live and move and have their being. It has passed into a commonplace of language to speak of men being 'dead to honour,' 'dead to shame,' 'dead' to this, that, and the other good and noble and gracious thing. And the same metaphor, if you like, lies here in my text—that men who have given their wills and inmost natures over to the dominion of self—and that is the definition of sin—that such men are, *ipso facto*, by reason of that very surrender of themselves to their worst selves, dead on what I may call the top side of their nature, and that all that is there is atrophied and dwindling away.

Unconsciousness is one characteristic of death. And oh! as I look round I know that there are tens, and perhaps hundreds, of men and women who are all but utterly unconscious of a whole universe in which are

the only realities, and to which it becomes them to have access. You live, in the physical sense, and move and have your being in God, and yet your inmost life would not be altered one hair's-breadth if there were no God at all. You pass the most resplendent instances and illustrations of His presence, His work, and you see nothing. You are blind on that side of your natures; or, as my text says, dead to the whole spiritual realm. Just as if there were a brick wall run against some man's windows so that he could see nothing out of them; so you, by your persistent adherence to the paltry present, the material, the visible, the selfish, have reared up a wall against the windows of your souls that look heavenwards; and of God, and all the lofty starry realities that cluster round Him, you are as unconscious as the corpse upon its bier is of the sunshine that plays upon its pallid features, or of the dew that falls on its stiffened limbs. Dead, because of sin—is that exaggeration? Is it exaggeration which charges all but absolute unconsciousness of spiritual realities upon worldly men like some of you?

And, then, take another illustration. Another of the signatures of death is inactivity. And oh! what faculties in some of my friends listening to me now are shrivelled and all but extinct! They are dormant, at any rate, to use another word, for the death of my text is not so absolute a death but that a resurrection is possible, and so *dormant* comes to express pretty nearly the same thing. Faculties of service, of enthusiasm, of life for God, of noble obedience to Him—what have you done with them? Left them there until they have stiffened like an unused lock, or rusted like the hinges of an unopened door; and you are as little active in all the noblest activities of spirit, which

are activities in submission to and dependence upon Him, as if you were laid in your coffin with your idle hands crossed for evermore upon an unheaving breast.

There is another illustration that I may suggest for a moment. Decay is another characteristic and signature of death. And your best self, in some of you, is rotting to corruption by sin.

Ay! Dear brethren, when we think of these tragedies of suicide that are going on in thousands of men round about us to-day, it seems to me as if the metaphor and the reality were reversed; and instead of saying that my text is a violent metaphor, transferring the facts of material death and corruption to the spiritual realm, I am almost disposed to say it is the other way about, and the real death is the death of the spirit; and the outer dissolution and unconsciousness and inactivity of the material body is only a kind of parable to preach to men what are the awful invisible facts ever associated with the fact of transgression.

There are three lives possible for each of us; two of them involuntary, the third requiring our consent and effort, but all of them sustained by the same cause. The first of them is that which we call life, the activity and the consciousness of the bodily frame; and that continues as long as the power of God keeps the body in life. When He withdraws His hand there comes what the senses call death. Then there is the natural life of thinking, loving, willing, enjoying, sorrowing, and the like, and that continues as long as He who is the life and light of men breathes into them the breath of that life. And these two are lived or died largely without the man's own consent or choice.

But there is a third life, when all that lower is lifted

to God, and thinking and willing and loving and enjoying and aspiring and trusting and obeying, and all these natural faculties find their home and their consecration and their immortality in Him. That life is only lived by our own will and it is the true life, and the others are, as I said, but parables, and envelopes, and vehicles, as it were, in which this life is carried, that is more precious than they. In the physical realm, separate the body from God, and it dies. In the natural conscious life, separate the soul, as we call it, from God, and it dies. And in the higher region, separate the spirit, which is the man grasping God, from God, and he dies; and that is the real death. Both the others are nothing in comparison with it.

It may co-exist with a large amount of intellectual and other forms of activity, as we see all round about us, and that makes it only the more ghastly and the sadder. You are full of energy in regard to all other subjects, but smitten into torpor about the highest; ready to live, to work, to enjoy, to think, to will, in all other directions, and utterly unconscious and unconcerned, or all but utterly unconscious and unconcerned, in regard to God.

Oh! a death which is co-existent with such feverish intensity of life as the most of you are expending all the week at your business and your daily pursuits is among the saddest of all the tragedies that angels are called upon to weep over, and that men are fools enough to enact. Brother! If the representation is a gloomy one, do not you think that it is better to ask the question—Is it a true one? than, Is it a cheerful one? I lay it upon your hearts that he that lives to God and with God is alive to the centre as well as out

to the finger tips and circumference of his visible being. He that is dead to God is dead indeed whilst he lives.

II. Now, notice, in the second place, the pitying love that looks down on the cemetery.

‘God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us.’ Thus the great truth that is taught us here, first of all, is that that divine love of the Divine Father bends down over His dead children and cherishes them still. Oh! you can do much in separating yourselves from God through selfishness, selfwill, sensuality, or other forms of sin, but there is one thing you cannot do, you cannot prevent His loving you. If I might venture without seeming irreverent, I would point to that pathetic page in the Old Testament history where the king hears of the death, red-handed in treason, of his darling son, and careless of victory and forgetful of everything else, and oblivious that Absalom was a rebel, and only remembering that he was his boy, burst into that monotonous wail that has come down over all the centuries as the deepest expression of undying fatherly love. ‘Oh! my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Oh! Absalom, my son, my son!’ The name and the relationship will well up out of the Father’s heart, whatever the child’s crime. We are all His Absaloms, and though we are dead in trespasses and in sins, God, who is rich in mercy, bends over us and loves us with His great love.

The Apostle might well expatiate in these two varying forms of speech, both of them intended to express the same thing—‘rich in mercy’ and ‘great in love.’ For surely a love which takes account of the sin that cannot repel it, and so shapes itself into mercy, sparing,

and departing from the strict line of retribution and justice, is great. And surely a mercy which refuses to be provoked by seventy times seven transgressions in an hour, not to say a day, is rich. That mercy is wider than all humanity, deeper than all sin, was before all rebellion, and will last for ever. And it is open for every soul of man to receive if he will.

But there is another point to be noticed in reference to this wonderful manifestation of the divine love looking down upon the myriads of men dead in sin, and that is that this love shapes the divine action. Mark the language of our text, in which the Apostle attributes a certain line of conduct in the divine dealings with us to the fact of His great love. Because 'He loved us' therefore He did so and so. Now about that I have only two remarks to make, and I will make them very briefly. The one is, here is a demonstration, for some of you people who do not believe in the Evangelical doctrine of an Atonement by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, that the true scriptural representation of that doctrine is not that which caricaturists have represented it—viz. that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ changed in any manner the divine heart and disposition. It is not as unfriendly critics (who, perhaps, are not to be so much blamed for their unfriendliness as for their superficiality) would have us to believe, that the doctrine of Atonement says that God loves because Christ died. But the Apostle who preached that doctrine and looked upon it as the very heart and centre of his message to the world here puts as the true sequence—Christ died because God loves. Jesus Christ said the same thing, 'God so loved the world that He sent His Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should be saved.'

And that brings me to the second of the remarks which I wish briefly to make—viz. this, that the Divine Love, great, patient, wonderful, unrepelled by men's sin, as it is, has to adopt a process to reach its end. God by His love does not, because He cannot, raise these dead souls into a life of righteousness without Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ comes to be the channel and the medium through which the love of God may attain its end. God's pitying love, because 'He is rich in mercy,' is not turned away by man's sin; and God's pitying love, because 'He is rich in mercy,' quickens men not by a bare will, but by the mission and work of His dear Son.

III. And so that is the last thing on which I speak a word—viz. the resurrection of the dead souls.

They died of sin. That was the disease that killed them. They cannot be quickened unless the disease be conquered. Dear brethren, I have to preach—not to argue, but to preach—and to press upon each soul the individual acceptance of the Death of Jesus Christ as being for each of us, if we will trust Him, the death of our death, and the death of our sin. By His great sacrifice and sufficient oblation He has borne the sins of the world and has taken away their guilt. And in Him the inmost reality of the spiritual death, and its outermost parable of corporeal dissolution, are equally and simultaneously overcome. If you will take Him for your Lord you will rise from the death of guilt, condemnation, selfishness, and sin into a new life of liberty, sonship, consecration, and righteousness, and will never see death.

And, on the other hand, the life of Jesus Christ is available for all of us. If we will put our trust in Him, His life will pass into our deadness; He Himself will

vitalise our being, dormant capacities will be quickened and brought into blessed activity, a new direction will be given to the old faculties, desires, aspirations, emotions of our nature. The will will tower into new power because it obeys. The heart will throb with a better life because it has grasped a love that cannot change and will never die. And the thinking power will be brought into living, personal contact with the personal Truth, so that whatsoever darknesses and problems may still be left, at the centre there will be light and satisfaction and peace. You will live if you trust Christ and let Him be your Life.

And if thus, by simple faith in Him, knowing that the power of His atoning death has destroyed the burden of our guilt and condemnation, and knowing the quickening influences of His constraining love as drawing us to love new things and make us new creatures, we receive into our inmost spirits 'the law of the spirit of life' which was in Christ Jesus, and are thereby made 'free from the law of sin and death,' then it is only a question of time, when the vitalising force shall flow into all the cracks and crannies of our being and deliver us wholly from the bondage of corruption in the outer as well as in the inner life; for they who have learned that Christ is the life of their lives upon earth can never cease their appropriation of the fulness of His quickening power until He has 'changed the body of their humiliation into the likeness of the body of His glory, according to the working whereby He is able to subdue even all things unto Himself.'

Brethren! He Himself has said, and His words I beseech you to remember though you forget all mine, 'He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet

shall he live, and he that liveth and believeth in Me shall never die.' 'Believest thou this?'

'THE RICHES OF GRACE'

'That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.'—EPH. ii. 7.

ONE very striking characteristic of this epistle is its frequent reference to God's purposes, and what, for want of a better word, we must call His motives, in giving us Jesus Christ. The Apostle seems to rise even higher than his ordinary height, while he gazes up to the inaccessible light, and with calm certainty proclaims not only what God has done, but why He has done it. Through all the earlier portions of this letter, the things on earth are contemplated in the light of the things in heaven. The great work of redemption is illuminated by the thought of the will and meaning of God therein; for example, we read in Chapter i. that He 'hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ, according as He hath chosen us in Him,' and immediately after we read that He 'has predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ according to the good pleasure of His will.' Soon after, we hear that 'He hath revealed to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself'; and that our predestination to an inheritance in Christ is 'according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will.'

Not only so, but the motive or reason for the divine action in the gift of Christ is brought out in a rich variety of expression as being 'the praise of the glory

of His grace' (1-6), or 'that He might gather together in one all things in Christ' (1-10), or that 'we should be to the praise of His glory' (1-12), or that 'unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God.'

In like manner our text follows a sublime statement of what has been bestowed upon men in Jesus, with an equally sublime insight into the divine purpose of thereby showing 'the exceeding riches of His grace.' Such heights are not for our unaided traversing; it is neither reverent nor safe to speculate, and still less to dogmatise, concerning the meaning of the divine acts, but here, at all events, we have, as I believe, not a man making unwarranted assertions about God's purposes, but God Himself by a man, letting us see so far into the depths of Deity as to know the very deepest meaning of His very greatest acts, and when God speaks, it is neither reverent nor safe to refuse to listen.

I. The purpose of God in Christ is the display of His grace.

Of course we cannot speak of motives in the divine mind as in ours; they imply a previous state of indecision and an act of choice, from which comes the slow emerging of a resolve like that of the moon from the sea. A given end being considered by us desirable, we then cast about for means to secure it, which again implies limitation of power. Still we can speak of God's motives, if only we understand, as this epistle puts it so profoundly, that His 'is an eternal purpose which He purposed in Himself,' which never began to be formed, and was not formed by reason of anything external.

With that caution Paul would have us think that God's chiefest purpose in all the wondrous facts which

make up the Gospel is the setting forth of Himself, and that the chiefest part of Himself, which He desires that all men should come to know, is the glory of His grace. Of course very many and various reasons for these acts may be alleged, but this is the deepest of them all. It has often been misunderstood and made into a very hard and horrible doctrine, which really means little else than all-mighty selfishness, but it is really a most blessed one; it is the proclamation in tenderest, most heart-melting fashion of the truth that God is Love, and therefore delights in imparting that which is His creatures' life and blessedness; it bids us think that He, too, amidst the blessedness of His infinite Being, knows the joy of communicating which makes so large a part of the blessedness of our finite selves, and that He, too, is capable of being touched and gladdened by the joy of expression. As an artist in his noblest work paints or chisels simply for love of pouring out his soul, so, but in infinitely loftier fashion, the great Artist delights to manifest Himself, and in manifesting to communicate somewhat of Himself. Creation is divine self-revelation, and we might say, with all reverence, that God acts as birds sing, and fountains leap, and stars shine.

But our text leads us still farther into mysteries of glory, when it defines what it is in God that he most desires to set forth. It is the 'exceeding riches of Grace,' in which wonderful expression we note the Apostle's passionate accumulation of epithets which he yet feels to be altogether inadequate to his theme. It would carry us too far to attempt to bring out the whole wealth contained in these words which glide so easily over unthinking lips, but we may lovingly dwell for a few moments upon them. Grace, in Paul's

language, means love lavished upon the undeserving and sinful, a love which is not drawn forth by the perception of any excellence in its objects, but wells up and out like a fountain, by reason of the impulse in its subject, and which in itself contains and bestows all good and blessing. There may be, as this very letter shows, other aspects of the divine nature which God is glad that man should know. His power and His wisdom have their noblest illustration in the work of Jesus, and are less conspicuously manifested in all His work; but His grace is shrined in Christ alone, and from Him flows forth into a thirsty world. That love, 'unmerited and free,' holds in solution power, wisdom and all the other physical or metaphysical perfections belonging to God with all their energies. It is the elixir in which they are all contained, the molten splendour into which have been dissolved gold and jewels and all precious things. When we look at Christ, we see the divinest thing in God, and that is His grace. The Christ who shows us and certifies to us the grace of God must surely be more than man. Men look at Him and see it; He shows us that grace because He was full of grace and truth.

But Paul is here not propounding theological dogmas, but pouring out a heart full of personal experience, and so adds yet other words to express what he himself has found in the Divine Grace, and speaks of its riches. He has learned fully to trust its fulness, and in his own daily life has had the witness of its inexhaustible abundance, which remains the same after all its gifts. It 'operates unspent.' That continually self-communicating love pours out in no narrower stream to its last recipient than to its first. All 'eat and are filled,' and after they are satisfied,

twelve baskets full of fragments are taken up. These riches are exceeding; they surpass all human conception, all parallel, all human needs; they are properly transcendent.

This, then, is what God would have us know of Himself. So His love is at once the motive of His great message to us in Jesus Christ, and is the whole contents of the message, like some fountain, the force of whose pellucid waters cleanses the earth, and rushes into the sunshine, being at once the reason for the flow and that which flows. God reveals because He loves, and His love is that which He reveals.

II. The great manifestation of grace is God's kindness to us in Christ.

All the revelation of God in Creation and Providence carries the same message, but it is often there hard to decipher, like some half-obliterated inscription in a strange tongue. In Jesus the writing is legible, continuous, and needs no elaborate commentary to make its meaning intelligible. But we may note that what the Apostle founds on here is not so much Christ in Himself, as that which men receive in Christ. As he puts it in another part of this epistle, it is 'through the Church' that 'principalities and powers in heavenly places' are made to 'know the manifold wisdom of God.' It is 'His kindness towards us' by which 'to the ages to come,' is made known the exceeding riches of grace, and that kindness can be best estimated by thinking what we were, namely, dead in trespasses and sins; what we are, namely, quickened together in Christ; raised up with Him, and with Him made to sit in heavenly places, as the immediately preceding clauses express it. All this marvellous transformation of conditions and of self is realised 'in Christ Jesus.'

These three words recur over and over again in this profound epistle, and may be taken as its very keynote. It would carry us beyond all limits to deal with the various uses and profound meanings of this phrase in this letter, but we may at least point out how intimately and inseparably it is intertwined with the other aspect of our relations to Christ in which He is mainly regarded as dying for us, and may press upon you that these two are not, as they have sometimes been taken to be, antagonistic but complementary. We shall never understand the depths of the one Apostolic conception unless we bring it into closest connection with the other. Christ is for us only if we are in Christ; we are in Christ only because He died for us.

God's kindness is all 'in Christ Jesus'; in Him is the great channel through which His love comes to men, the river of God which is full of water. And that kindness is realised by us when we are 'in Christ.' Separated from Him we do not possess it; joined to Him as we may be by true faith in Him, it is ours, and with it all the blessings which it brings into our else empty and thirsting hearts. Now all this sets in strong light the dignity and work of Christian men; the profundity and clearness of their religious character is the great sign to the world of the love of God. The message of Christ to man lacks one chief evidence of its worth if they who profess to have received it do not, in their lives, show its value. The characters of Christian people are in every age the clearest and most effectual witnesses of the power of the Gospel. God's honour is in their hands. The starry heavens are best seen by reflecting telescopes, which, in their field, mirror the brightness above.

III. The manifestation of God through men 'in Christ' is for all ages.

In our text the ages to come open up into a vista of undefined duration, and, just as in another place in this epistle, Paul regards the Church as witnessing to the principalities and powers in heavenly places, so here he regards it as the perennial evidence to all generations of the ever-flowing riches of God's grace. Whatever may have been the Apostle's earlier expectations of the speedy coming of the day of the Lord, here he obviously expects the world to last through a long stretch of undefined time, and for all its changing epochs to have an unchanging light. That standing witness, borne by men in Christ, of the grace which has been so kind to them, is not to be antiquated nor superseded, but is as valid to-day as when these words gushed from the heart of Paul. Eyes which cannot look upon the sun can see it as a golden glory, tinging the clouds which lie cradled around it. And as long as the world lasts, so long will Christian men be God's witnesses to it.

There are then two questions of infinite importance to us—do we show in character and conduct the grace which we have received by reverently submitting ourselves to its transforming energy? We need to be very close to Him for ourselves if we would worthily witness to others of what we have found Him to be. We have but too sadly marred our witness, and have been like dim reflectors round a lamp which have received but little light from it, and have communicated even less than we have received. Do we see the grace that shines so brightly in Jesus Christ? God longs that we should so see; He calls us by all endearments and by loving threats to look to that Incarnation

of Himself. And when we lift our eyes to behold, what is it that meets our gaze? Intolerable light? The blaze of the white throne? Power that crushes our puny might? No! the 'exceeding riches of grace.' The voice cries, 'Behold your God!' and what we see is, 'In the midst of the throne a lamb as it had been slain.'

SALVATION: GRACE: FAITH

'By grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.'—EPH. ii. 8 (R. V.).

HERE are three of the key-words of the New Testament—'grace,' 'saved,' 'faith.' Once these terms were strange and new; now they are old and threadbare. Once they were like lava, glowing and cast up from the central depths; but it is a long while since the eruption, and the blocks have got cold, and the corners have been rubbed off them. I am afraid that some people, when they read such a text, will shrug the shoulder of weariness, and think that they are in for a dreary sermon.

But the more familiar a word is, the more likely are common ideas about it to be hazy. We substitute acquaintance with the sound for penetration into the sense. A frond of sea-weed, as long as it is in the ocean, unfolds its delicate films and glows with its subdued colours. Take it out, and it is hard and brown and ugly, and you have to plunge it into the water again before you see its beauty. So with these well-worn Christian terms; you have to put them back, by meditation and thought, especially as to their bearing on yourself, in order to understand their significance

and to feel their power. And, although it is very hard, I want to try and do that for a few moments with this grand thought that lies in my text.

I. Here we have the Christian view of man's deepest need, and God's greatest gift.

'Ye have been saved.' Now, as I have said, 'saved,' and 'salvation,' and 'Saviour,' are all threadbare words. Let us try to grasp the whole throbbing meaning that is in them. Well, to begin with, and in its original and lowest application, this whole set of expressions is applied to physical danger from which it delivers, and physical disease which it heals. So, in the Gospels, for instance, you find 'Thy faith hath made thee whole'—literally, '*saved thee.*' And you hear one of the Apostles crying, in an excess of terror and collapse of faith, 'Save! Master! we perish!' The two notions that are conveyed in our familiar expression 'safe and sound,' both lie in the word—deliverance from danger, and healing of disease.

Then, when you lift it up into the loftier region, into which Christianity buoyed it up, the same double meaning attaches to it. The Christian salvation is, on its negative side, a deliverance from something impending—peril—and a healing of something infecting us—the sickness of sin.

It is a deliverance; what from? Take, in the briefest possible language, three sayings of Scripture to answer that question—what am I to be saved *from*? 'His name shall be called Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins.' He 'delivers'—or saves—'us from the wrath to come.' He 'saves a soul from death.' Sin, wrath, death, death spiritual as well as physical, these are the dangers which lie in wait; and the enemies which have laid their grip upon us. And from these, as the

shepherd drags the kid from the claws of the lion or the bear's hug, the salvation of the Gospel wrenches and rescues men.

The same general conceptions emerge, if we notice, on the other side—what are the things which the New Testament sets forth as the opposites of its salvation? Take, again, a brief reference to Scripture words: 'The Son of Man came *not to condemn* the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.' So the antithesis is between judgment or condemnation on the one hand, and salvation on the other. That suggests thoughts substantially identical with the preceding but still more solemn, as bringing in the prospect a tribunal and a judge. The Gospel then reveals the Mighty Power that lifts itself between us and judgment, the Mighty Power that intervenes to prevent absolute destruction, the Power which saves from sin, from wrath, from death.

Along with them we may take the other thought, that salvation, as the New Testament understands it, is not only the rescue and deliverance of a man from evils conceived to lie round about him, and to threaten his being from without, but that it is his healing from evils which have so wrought themselves into his very being, and infected his whole nature, as that the emblem for them is a sickness unto death for the healing from which this mighty Physician comes. These are the negative sides of this great Christian thought.

But the New Testament salvation is more than a shelter, more than an escape. It not only trammels up evil possibilities, and prevents them from falling upon men's heads, but it introduces all good. It not only strips off the poisoned robe, but it invests with a

royal garb. It is not only negatively the withdrawal from the power, and the setting above the reach, of all evil, in the widest sense of that word, physical and moral, but it is the endowment with every good, in the widest sense of that word, physical and moral, which man is capable of receiving, or God has wealth to bestow. And this positive significance of the Christian salvation, which includes not only pardon, and favour, and purity, and blessedness here in germ, and sure and certain hope of an overwhelming glory hereafter—this is all suggested to us by the fact that in Scripture, more than once, to ‘have everlasting life,’ and to ‘enter into the Kingdom of God,’ are employed as equivalent and alternative expressions for being saved with the salvation of God.

And that leads me to another point—my text, as those of you who have used the Revised Version will observe, is there slightly modified in translation, and reads ‘*Ye have been saved*,’—a past act, done once, and with abiding present consequences, which are realised progressively in the Christian life, and reach forward into infinitude. So the Scripture sometimes speaks of salvation as past, ‘He saved us by His mercy’: sometimes of it as present and progressive, ‘The Lord added to the Church daily those that were (in process of) being saved’: sometimes of it as future, ‘now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.’ In that future all that is involved in the word will be evolved from it in blessed experience onwards through eternity.

I have said that we should try to make an effort to fathom the depth of meaning in this and other familiar commonplace terms of Scripture. But no effort prior to experience will ever fathom it. There was in the

papers some time ago an account of some extraordinary deep-sea soundings that have been made away down in the South Pacific, 29,400 feet and no bottom, and the wire broke. The highest peak of the Himalayas might be put into that abyss, and there would be hundreds of feet between it and the surface. He 'casts all our sins,' mountainous as they are, behind His back 'into the depths of the sea'; and no plummet that man can drop will ever reach its profound abyss. 'Thy judgments are a great deep,' and deeper than the judgments is the depth of Thy salvation.

And now, brethren, before I go further, notice the—I was going to say theory, but that is a cold word—the facts of man's condition and need that underlie this great Christian term of salvation—viz. we are all in deadly peril; we are all sick of a fatal disease. 'Ah!' you say, 'that is Paul.' Yes! it is Paul. But it is not Paul only; it is Paul's Master, and, I hope, your Master; for He not only spoke loving, gentle words of and about men, and not only was grace poured into His lips, but there is another side to His utterances. No one ever spoke sadder, sterner words about the real condition of men than Jesus Christ did. Lost sheep, lost coins, prodigal sons, builders of houses on the sand that are destined to be blown down and flooded away, men in danger of an undying worm and unquenchable fire—these are parts of Christ's representations of the condition of humanity, and these are the conceptions that underlie this great thought of salvation as being man's deepest need.

It goes far deeper down than any of the superficial constructions of what humanity requires, which are found among non-Christian, social and economical, and intellectual and political reformers. It includes

all that is true in the estimate of any of these people, and it supplies all that they aim at. But it goes far beyond them. And as they stand pottering round the patient, and administering—what shall I say? ‘pills for the earthquake,’ as we once heard—it comes and brushes them aside and says, ‘Physicians of no value! here is *the* thing that is wanted—salvation that comes from God.’

Brother! it is what you need. Do not be led away by the notion that wealth, or culture, or anything less than Christ’s gift to men will meet your necessities. If once we catch a glimpse of what we really are, there will be no words wanted to enforce the priceless value of the salvation that the Gospel offers. It is sure to be an uninteresting word and thing to a man who does not feel himself to be a sinner. It is sure to be of perennial worth to a man who does. Life-belts lie unnoticed on the cabin-shelf above the berth as long as the sun is bright, and the sea calm, and everything goes well; but when the ship gets on the rocks the passengers fight to get them. If you know yourself, you will know that salvation is what you need.

II. Here we have the Christian unfolding of the source of salvation.

‘By grace ye have been saved.’ There is another threadbare word. It is employed in the New Testament with a very considerable width of signification, which we do not need to attend to here. But, in regard of the present context, let me just point out that the main idea conveyed by the word is that of favour, or lovingkindness, or goodwill, especially when directed to inferiors, and most eminently when given to those who do not deserve it, but deserve its opposite. ‘Grace’ is love that stoops and that requites, not according to

desert, but bestows upon those who deserve nothing of the kind; so when the Apostle declares that the source of salvation is 'grace,' he declares two things. One is that the fountain of all our deliverance from sin, and of our healing of our sicknesses, lies in the deep heart of God, from which it wells up undrawn, unmotivated, uncaused by anything except His own infinite loving-kindness. People have often presented the New Testament teaching about salvation as if it implied that God's love was brought to man because Jesus Christ died, and turned the divine affections. That is not New Testament teaching. Christ's death is not the cause of God's love, but God's love is the cause of Christ's death. 'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.'

When we hear in the Old Testament, 'I am that I am,' we may apply it to this great subject. For that declaration of the very inmost essence of the divine nature is not merely the declaration, in half metaphysical terms, of a self-substituting, self-determining Being, high above limitation and time and change, but it is a declaration that when He loves He loves freely and unmodified save by the constraint of His own Being. Just as the light, because it is light and must radiate, falls upon dunghills and diamonds, upon black rocks and white snow, upon ice-peaks and fertile fields, so the great fountain of the Divine Grace pours out upon men by reason only of its own continual tendency to communicate its own fulness and blessedness.

There follows from that the other thought, on which the Apostle mainly dwells in our context, that the salvation which we need, and may have, is not won by desert, but is given as a gift. Mark the last words of

my text—‘that not of yourselves it is the gift of God.’ They have often been misunderstood, as if they referred to the faith which is mentioned just before. But that is a plain misconception of the Apostle’s meaning, and is contradicted by the whole context. It is not faith that is the gift of God, but it is salvation by grace. That is plain if you will read on to the next verse. ‘By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works lest any man should boast.’ What is it that is ‘not of works’? Faith? certainly not. Nobody would ever have thought it worth while to say, ‘faith is *not* of works,’ because nobody would have said that it *was*. The two clauses necessarily refer to the same thing, and if the latter of them must refer to salvation by grace, so must the former. Thus, the Apostle’s meaning is that we get salvation, not because we work for it but because God gives it as a free gift, for which we have nothing to render, and which we can never deserve.

Now, I am sure that there are some of you who are saying to yourselves, ‘This is that old, threadbare, commonplace preaching again!’ Well! shame on us preachers if we have made a living Gospel into a dead theology. And shame no less on you hearers if by you the words that should be good news that would make the tongue of the dumb sing, and the lame man leap as a hart, have been petrified and fossilised into a mere dogma.

I know far better than you do how absolutely inadequate all my words are, but I want to bring it to you and to lay it not on your heads only but on your hearts, as the good news that we all need, that we have not to buy, that we have not to work to get salvation,

but that having got it we have to work thereafter. 'What shall we do that we might work the works of God?' A whole series of diverse, long, protracted, painful toils? Christ swept away the question by striking out the 's' at the end of the word, and answered, 'This is the *work*' (not 'works') 'of God,' the one thing which will open out into all heroism and practical obedience, 'that ye believe on Him to whom He hath sent.'

III. That leads me to the last point—viz. the Christian requirement of the condition of salvation.

Note the precision of the Apostle's prepositions: 'Ye have been saved *by* grace'; there is the source—'Ye have been saved by grace, *through* faith'—there is the medium, the instrument, or, if I may so say, the channel; or, to put it into other words, the condition by which the salvation which has its source in the deep heart of God pours its waters into my empty heart. 'Through faith,' another threadbare word, which, withal, has been dreadfully darkened by many comments, and has unfortunately been so represented as that people fancy it is some kind of special attitude of mind and heart, which is only brought to bear in reference to Christ's Gospel. It is a thousand pities, one sometimes thinks, that the word was not translated 'trust' instead of 'faith,' and then we should have understood that it was not a theological virtue at all, but just the common thing that we all know so well, which is the cement of human society and the blessedness of human affection, and which only needs to be lifted, as a plant that had been running along the ground, and had its tendrils bruised and its fruit marred might be lifted, and twined round the pillar of God's throne, in order to grow up and bear fruit that shall be

found after many days unto praise, and honour, and glory.

Trust; that is the condition. The salvation rises from the heart of God. You cannot touch the stream at its source, but you can tap it away down in its flow. What do you want machinery and pumps for? Put a yard of wooden pipe into the river, and your house will have all the water it needs.

So, dear brethren, here is the condition—it is a condition only, for there is no virtue in the act of trust, but only in that with which we are brought into living union when we do trust. When salvation comes into my heart by faith it is not my faith but God's grace that puts salvation there.

Faith is only the condition, ay! but it is the indispensable condition. How many ways are there of getting possession of a gift? One only, I should suppose, and that is, to put out a hand and take it. If salvation is *by* grace it must be '*through* faith.' If you will not accept you cannot have. That is the plain meaning of what theologians call justification by faith; that pardon is given on condition of taking it. If you do not take it you cannot have it. And so this is the upshot of the whole—trust, and you have.

Oh, dear friends! open your eyes to see your dangers. Let your conscience tell you of your sickness. Do not try to deliver, or to heal yourselves. Self-reliance and self-help are very good things, but they leave their limitations, and they have no place here. 'Every man his own Redeemer' will not work. You can no more extricate yourself from the toils of sin than a man can release himself from the folds of a python. You can no more climb to heaven by your own effort than you

can build a railway to the moon. You must sue *in forma pauperis*, and be content to accept as a boon an unmerited place in your Father's heart, an undeserved seat at His bountiful table, an unearned share in His wealth, from the hands of your Elder Brother, in whom is all His grace, and who gives salvation to every sinner if he will trust Him. 'By grace have ye been saved through faith.'

GOD'S WORKMANSHIP AND OUR WORKS

'We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.'—EPH. ii. 10.

THE metal is molten as it runs out of the blast furnace, but it soon cools and hardens. Paul's teaching about salvation by grace and by faith came in a hot stream from his heart, but to this generation his words are apt to sound coldly, and hardly theological. But they only need to be reflected upon in connection with our own experience, to become vivid and vital again. The belief that a man may work towards salvation is a universal heresy. And the Apostle, in the context, summons all his force to destroy that error, and to substitute the great truth that we have to begin with an act of God's, and only after that can think about our acts. To work up towards salvation is, in the strict sense of the words, *preposterous*; it is inverting the order of things. It is beginning at the wrong end. It is saying X Y Z before you have learnt to say A B C. We are to work downwards from salvation because we have it, not that we may get it. And whatever 'good works' may mean, they are the con-

sequences, not the causes, of 'salvation,' whatever that may mean. But they are consequences, and they are the very purpose of it. So says Paul in the archaic language of my text—which only wants a little steadfast looking at to be turned into up-to-date gospel—'We are His workmanship, created unto good works'; and the fact that we are is one great reason for the assertion which he brings it in to buttress, that we are saved by grace, not by works. Now, I wish, in the simplest possible way, to deal with these great words, and take them as they lie before us.

I. We have, first, then, this as the root of everything, the divine creation.

Now, you will find that in this profound letter of the Apostle there are two ideas cropping up over and over again, both of them representing the facts of the Christian life and of the transition from the unchristian to the Christian; and the one is Resurrection and the other is Creation. They have this in common, that they suggest the idea that the great gift which Christianity brings to men—no, do not let me use the abstract word 'Christianity'—the great gift which *Christ* brings to men—is a new life. The low popular notion that salvation means mainly and primarily immunity from the ultimate, most lasting future consequences of transgression, a change of place or of condition, infects us all, and is far too dominant in our popular notions of Christianity and of salvation. And it is because people have such an unworthy, narrow, selfish idea of what 'salvation' is that they fall into the bog of misconception as to how it is to be attained. The ordinary man's way of looking at the whole matter is summed up in a sentence which I heard not long since about a recently deceased friend of the

speaker's, and the like of which you have no doubt often heard and perhaps said, 'He is sure to be saved because he has lived so straight.' And at the foundation of that confident epitaph lay a tragical, profound misapprehension of what salvation was.

For it is something done in you; it is *not* something that you get, but it is something that you become. The teaching of this letter, and of the whole New Testament, is that the profoundest and most precious of all the gifts which come to us in Jesus Christ, and which in their totality are summed up in the one word that has so little power over us, because we understand it so little, and know it so well—'salvation'—is a change in a man's nature so deep, radical, vital, as that it may fairly be paralleled with a resurrection from the dead.

Now, I venture to believe that it is something more than a strong rhetorical figure when that change is described as being the creation of a new man within us. The resurrection symbol for the same fact may be treated as but a symbol. You cannot treat the teaching of a new life in Christ as being a mere figure. It is something a great deal more than that, and when once a man's eye is opened to look for it in the New Testament it is wonderful how it flashes out from every page and underlies the whole teaching. The Gospel of John, for example, is but one long symphony which has for its dominant theme 'I am come that they might have life.' And that great teaching—which has been so vulgarised, narrowed, and mishandled by sacerdotal pretensions and sacramentarian superstitions—that great teaching of Regeneration, or the new birth, rests upon this as its very basis, that what takes place when a man turns

to Jesus Christ, and is saved by Him, is that there is communicated to him not in symbol but in spiritual fact (and spiritual facts are far more true than external ones which are called real) a spark of Christ's own life, something of 'that spirit of life which was in Christ Jesus,' and by which, and by which alone, being transfused into us, we become 'free from the law of sin and death.' I beseech you, brethren, see that, in your perspective of Christian truth, the thought of a new life imparted to us has as prominent and as dominant a place as it obviously has in the teaching of the New Testament. It is not so dominant in the current notions of Christianity that prevail amongst average people, but it is so in all men who let themselves be guided by the plain teaching of Christ Himself and of all His servants. Salvation? Yes! And the very essence of the salvation is the breathing into me of a divine life, so that I become partaker of 'the divine nature.'

Now, there is another step to be taken, and that is that this new life is realised in Christ Jesus. Now, this letter of the Apostle is distinguished even amongst his letters by the extraordinary frequency and emphasis with which he uses that expression 'in Christ Jesus.' If you will take up the epistle, and run your eye over it at your leisure, I think you will be surprised to find how, in all connections, and linked with every sort of blessing and good as its condition, there recurs that phrase. It is 'in Christ' that we obtain the inheritance; it is 'in Christ' that we receive 'redemption, even the forgiveness of sins'; it is in Him that we are 'builded together for a habitation of God'; it is in Him that all fulness of divine gifts, and all blessedness of spiritual capacities, is communicated to us; and

unless, in our perspective of the Christian life, that expression has the same prominence as it has in this letter, we have yet to learn the sweetest sweetness, and have yet to receive the most mighty power, of the Gospel that we profess. 'In Christ'—a union which leaves the individuality of the Saviour and of the saint unimpaired, because without such individuality sweet love were slain, and there were no communion possible, but which is so close, so real, so vital, as that only the separating wall of personality and individual consciousness comes in between—that is the New Testament teaching of the relation of the Christian to Christ. Is it your experience, dear brother? Do not be frightened by talking about mysticism. If a Christianity has no mysticism it has no life. There is a wholesome mysticism and there is a morbid one, and the wholesome one is the very nerve of the Gospel as it is presented by Jesus Himself: 'I am the Vine, ye are the branches. Abide in Me, and I in you.' If our nineteenth century busy Christianity could only get hold of that truth as firmly as it grasps the representative and sacrificial character of Christ's work, I believe it would come like a breath of spring over 'the winter of our discontent,' and would change profoundly and blessedly the whole contexture of modern Christianity.

And now there is another step to take, and that is that this union with Christ, which results in the communication of a new life, or, as my text puts it, a new creation, depends upon our faith. We are not passive in the matter. There is the condition on which the entrance of the life into our spirits is made possible. You must open the door, you must fling wide the casement, and the blessed warm morning air of the

sun of righteousness, with healing in its beams, will rush in, scatter the darkness and raise the temperature. 'Faith,' by which we simply mean the act of the mind in accepting and of the will and heart in casting one's self upon Christ as the Saviour—that act is the condition of this new life. And so each Christian is 'God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus.'

And now, says Paul—and here some of us will hesitate to follow him—that new creation has to go before what you call 'good works.' Now, do not let us exaggerate. There has seldom been a more disastrous and untrue thing said than what one of the Fathers dared to say, that the virtues of godless men were 'splendid vices.' That is not so, and that is not the New Testament teaching. Good is good, whoever does it. But, then, no man will say that actions, however they may meet the human conception of excellence, however bright, pure, lofty in motive and in aim they may be, reach their highest possible radiance and are as good as they ought to be, if they are done without any reference to God and His love. Dear brethren, we surely do not need to have the alphabet of morality repeated to us, that the worth of an action depends upon its motive, that no motive is correspondent to our capacities and our relation to God and our consequent responsibilities, except the motive of loving obedience to Him. Unless that be present, the brightest of human acts must be convicted of having dark shadows in it, and all the darker because of the brightness that may stream from it. And so I venture to assert that since the noblest systems of morality, apart from religion, will all coincide in saying that to be is more than to do, and that the worth of an action

depends upon its motive, we are brought straight up to the 'narrow, bigoted' teaching of the New Testament, that unless a man is swayed by the love of God in what he does, you cannot, in the most searching analysis, say that his deed is as good as it ought to be, and as it might be. To be good is the first thing, to do good is the second. Make the tree good and its fruit good. And since, as we have made ourselves we are evil, there must come a re-creation before we can do the good deeds which our relation to God requires at our hands.

II. I ask you to look at the purpose of this new creation brought out in our text.

'Created in Christ Jesus unto good works.' That is what life is given to you for. That is why you are saved, says Paul. Instead of working upwards from works to salvation, take your stand at the received salvation, and understand what it is for, and work downwards from it.

Now, do not let us take that phrase, 'good works,' which I have already said came hot from the Apostle's heart, and is now cold as a bar of iron, in the limited sense which it has come to bear in modern religious phraseology. It means something a great deal more than that. It covers the whole ground of what the Apostle, in another of his letters, speaks of when he says, 'Whatsoever things are lovely and of good report, if there be any virtue'—to use for a moment the world's word, which has such power to conjure in Greek ethics—'or if there be any praise'—to use for a moment the world's low motive, which has such power to sway men—'think of these things,' and these things do. That is the width of the conception of 'good works'; everything that is 'lovely and of

good report.' That is what you receive the new life for.

Contrast that with other notions of the purpose of revelation and redemption. Contrast it with what I have already referred to, and so need not enlarge upon now, the miserably inadequate and low notions of the essentials of salvation which one hears perpetually, and which many of us cherish. It is no mere immunity from a future hell. It is no mere entrance into a vague heaven. It is not escaping the penalty of the inexorable law, 'Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap,' that is meant by 'salvation,' any more than it is putting away the rod, which the child would be all the better for having administered to him, that is meant by 'forgiveness.' But just as forgiveness, in its essence, means not suspension nor abolition of penalty, but the uninterrupted flow of the Father's love, so salvation in its essence means, not the deliverance from any external evil or the alteration of anything in the external position, but the revolution and the re-creation of the man's nature. And the purpose of it is that the saved man may live in conformity with the will of God, and that on his character there may be embroidered all the fair things which God desires to see on His child's vesture.

Contrast it with the notion that an orthodox belief is the purpose of revelation. I remember hearing once of a man that 'he was a very shady character, but sound on the Atonement.' What is the use of being 'sound on the Atonement' if the Atonement does not make you live the Christ life? And what is the good of all your orthodoxy unless the orthodoxy of creed issues in orthopraxy of conduct? There are

far too many of us who half-consciously do still hold by the notion that if a man believes rightly then that makes him a Christian. My text shatters to pieces any such conception. You are saved that you may be good, and do good continually; and unless you are so doing you may be steeped to the eyebrows in the correctest of creeds, and it will only drown you.

Contrast this conception of the purpose of Christianity with the far too common notion that we are saved, mainly in order that we may indulge in devout emotions, and in the outgoing of affection and confidence to Jesus Christ. Emotional Christianity is necessary, but Christianity, which is mainly or exclusively emotional, lives next door to hypocrisy, and there is a door of communication between them. For there is nothing more certain and more often illustrated in experience than that there is a strange underground connection between a Christianity which is mainly fervid and a very shady life. One sees it over and over again. And the cure of that is to apprehend the great truth of my text, that we are saved, not in order that we may know aright, nor in order that we may feel aright, but in order that we may be good and do 'good works.' In the order of things, right thought touches the springs of right feeling, and right feeling sets going the wheels of right action. Do not let the steam all go roaring out of the waste-pipe in however sacred and blessed emotions. See that it is guided so as to drive the spindles and the shuttles and make the web.

III. And now, lastly, and only a word—here we have the field provided for the exercise of the 'good works.'

'Created unto good works which God has before prepared'—before the re-creation—'that we should walk in them.' That is to say, the true way to look at the life is to regard it as the exercising-ground which God has prepared for the development of the life that, through Christ, is implanted in us. He cuts the channels that the stream may flow. That is the way to look at tasks, at difficulties. Difficulty is the parent of power, and God arranges our circumstances in order that, by wrestling with obstacles, we may gain the 'thews that throw the world,' and in order that in sorrows and in joys, in the rough places and the smooth, we may find occasions for the exercise of the goodness which is lodged potentially in us, when He creates us in Christ Jesus. So be sure that the path and the power will always correspond. God does not lead us on roads that are too steep for our weakness, and too long for our strength. What He bids us do He fits us for; what He fits us for He thereby bids us do.

And so, dear brother, take heed that you are fulfilling the purpose for which you receive this new life. And let us all remember the order in which being and doing come. We must *be* good first, and then, and only then, shall we *do* good. We must have Christ for us first, our sacrifice and our means of receiving that new life, and then, Christ in us, the soul of our souls, the Life of our lives, the source of all our goodness.

'If any power we have, it is to ill,

And all the power is Thine to do and eke to will.'

'THE CHIEF CORNER-STONE'

'Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the chief corner-stone.'—EPH. ii. 20 (R. V.).

THE Roman Empire had in Paul's time gathered into a great unity the Asiatics of Ephesus, the Greeks of Corinth, the Jews of Palestine, and men of many another race, but grand and imposing as that great unity was, it was to Paul a poor thing compared with the oneness of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. Asiatics of Ephesus, Greeks of Corinth, Jews of Palestine and members of many another race could say, 'Our citizenship is in heaven.' The Roman Eagle swept over wide regions in her flight, but the Dove of Peace, sent forth from Christ's hand, travelled further than she. As Paul says in the context, the Ephesians had been strangers, 'aliens from the commonwealth of Israel,' wandering like the remnants of some 'broken clans,' but now they are gathered in. That narrow community of the Jewish nation has expanded its bounds and become the mother-country of believing souls, the true 'island of saints.' It was not Rome which really made all peoples one, but it was the weakest and most despised of her subject races. 'Of Zion it shall be said,' 'Lo! this and that man was born in her.'

To emphasise the thought of the great unity of the Church, the Apostle uses here his often-repeated metaphor of a temple, of which the Ephesian Christians are the stones, apostles and prophets the builders, and Christ Himself the chief corner-stone. Of course the representation of the foundation, as being laid by apostles and prophets, refers to them as proclaiming the Gospel. The real laying of the foundation is the

work of the divine power and love which gave us Christ, and it is the Divine Voice which proclaims, 'Behold I lay in Zion a foundation!' But that divine work has to be made known among men, and it is by the making of it known that the building rises course by course. There is no contradiction between the two statements, 'I have laid the foundation' and Paul's 'As a wise master-builder I have laid the foundation.'

A question may here rise as to the meaning of 'prophets.' Unquestionably the expression in other places of the Epistle does mean New Testament prophets, but seeing that here Jesus is designated as the foundation stone which, standing beneath two walls, has a face into each, and binds them strongly together, it is more natural to see in the prophets the representatives of the great teachers of the old dispensation as the apostles were of the new. The remarkable order in which these two classes are named, the apostles being first, and the prophets who were first in time being last in order of mention, confirms this explanation, for the two co-operating classes are named in the order in which they lie in the foundation. Digging down you come to the more recent first, to the earlier second, and deep and massive, beneath all, to the corner-stone on whom all rests, in whom all are united together. Following the Apostle's order we may note the process of building; beneath that, the foundation on which the building rests; and beneath it, the corner-stone which underlies and unites the whole.

I. The process of building.

In the previous clauses the Apostle has represented the condition of the Ephesian Christians before their Christianity as being that of strangers and foreigners,

lacking the rights of citizenship anywhere, a mob rather than in any sense a society. They had been like a confused heap of stones flung fortuitously together; they had become fellow-citizens with the saints. The stones had been piled up into an orderly building. He is not ignoring the facts of national, political, or civic relationships which existed independent of the new unity realised in a common faith. These relationships could not be ignored by one who had had Paul's experience of their formidable character as antagonists of him and of his message, but they seemed to him, in contrast with the still deeper and far more perfect union, which was being brought about in Christ, of men of all nationalities and belonging to mutually hostile races, to be little better than the fortuitous union of a pile of stones huddled together on the roadside. Measured against the architecture of the Church, as Paul saw it in his lofty idealism, the aggregations of men in the world do not deserve the name of buildings. His point of view is the exact opposite of that which is common around us, and which, alas! finds but too much support in the present aspects of the so-called churches of this day.

It is to be observed that in our text these stones are, in accordance with the propriety of the metaphor, regarded as *being* built, that is, as in some sense the subjects of a force brought to bear upon them, which results in their being laid together in orderly fashion and according to a plan, but it is not to be forgotten that, according to the teaching, not of this epistle alone, but of all Paul's letters, the living stones are active in the work of building, as well as beings subject to an influence. In another place of the New Testament we read the exhortation to 'build up

yourselves on your most holy faith,' and the means of discharging that duty are set forth in the words which follow it; as being 'Praying in the Holy Spirit, keeping yourselves in the love of God, and looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.'

Throughout the Pauline letters we have frequent references to *edifying*, a phrase which has been so vulgarised by much handling that its great meaning has been all but lost, but which still, rightly understood, presents the Christian life as one continuous effort after developing Christian character. Taking into view the whole of the apostolic references to this continuous process of building, we cannot but recognise that it all begins with the act of faith which brings men into immediate contact and vital union with Jesus Christ, and which is, if anything that a man does is, the act of his very inmost self passing out of its own isolation and resting itself on Jesus. It is by the vital and individual act of faith that any soul escapes from the dreary isolation of being a stranger and a foreigner, wandering, homeless and solitary, and finds through Jesus fellowship, an elder Brother, a Father, and a home populous with many brethren. But whilst faith is the condition of beginning the Christian life, which is the only real life, that life has to be continued and developed towards perfection by continuous effort. 'Tis a life-long toil till the lump be leavened.'

One of the passages already referred to varies the metaphor of building, in so far as it seems to represent 'your most holy faith' as the foundation, and may be an instance of the doubtful New Testament usage of 'faith,' as meaning the believed Gospel, rather than the personal act of believing. But however that may be,

the context of the words clearly suggests the practical duties by which the Christian life is preserved and strengthened. They who build up themselves do so, mainly, by keeping themselves in the love of God with watchful oversight and continual preparedness for struggle against all foes who would drag them from that safe fortress, and subsidiarily, by like continuity in prayer, and in fixing their meek hope on the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. If Christian character is ever to be made more Christian, it must be by a firmer grasp and a more vivid realisation of Christ and His truth. The more we feel ourselves to be lapped in the love of God, the more shall we be builded up on our most holy faith. There is no mystery about the means of Christian progress. That which, at the beginning, made a man a Christian shapes his whole future course; the measure of our faith is the measure of our advance.

But the Apostle, in the immediately following words, goes on to pass beyond the bounds of his metaphor, and with complete indifference to the charge of mixing figures, speaks of the building as growing. That thought leads us into a higher region than that of effort. The process by which a great forest tree thickens its boles, expands the sweep of its branches and lifts them nearer the heavens, is very different from that by which a building rises slowly and toilsomely and with manifest incompleteness all the time, until the flag flies on the roof-tree. And if we had not this nobler thought of a possible advance by the increasing circulation within us of a mysterious life, there would be little gospel in a word which only enjoined effort as the condition of moral progress, and there would be little to choose between Paul and Plato. He goes on immediately to

bring out more fully what he means by the growth of the building, when he says that if Christians are in Christ, they are 'built up for an habitation of God in the Spirit.' Union with Christ, and a consequent life in the Spirit, are sure to result in the growth of the individual soul and of the collective community. That divine Spirit dwells in and works through every believing soul, and while it is possible to grieve and to quench It, to resist and even to neutralise Its workings, these are the true sources of all our growth in grace and knowledge. The process of building may be and will be slow. Sometimes lurking enemies will pull down in a night what we have laboured at for many days. Often our hands will be slack and our hearts will droop. We shall often be tempted to think that our progress is so slow that it is doubtful if we have ever been on the foundation at all or have been building at all. But 'the Spirit helpeth our infirmities,' and the task is not ours alone but His in us. We have to recognise that effort is inseparable from building, but we have also to remember that growth depends on the free circulation of life, and that if we are, and abide in, Jesus, we cannot but be built 'for an habitation of God in the Spirit.' We may be sure that whatever may be the gaps and shortcomings in the structures that we rear here, none will be able to say of us at the last, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'

II. The foundation on which the building rests.

In the Greek, as in our version, there is no definite article before 'prophets,' and its absence indicates that both sets of persons here mentioned come under the common *vinculum* of the one definite article preceding the first named. So that apostles and prophets belong

to one class. It may be a question whether the foundation is theirs in the sense that they constitute it, an explanation in favour of which can be quoted the vision in the Apocalypse of the new Jerusalem, in the twelve foundations of which were written the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, or whether, as is more probable, the foundation is conceived of as laid by them. In like manner the Apostle speaks to the Corinthians of having 'as a wise master-builder laid the foundation,' and to the Romans of making it his aim to preach especially where Christ was not already named, that he might 'not build upon another man's foundation.' Following these indications, it seems best to understand the preaching of the Gospel as being the laying of the foundation.

Further, the question may be raised whether the prophets here mentioned belong to the Old Testament or to the New. The latter alternative has been preferred on the ground that the apostles are named first, but, as we have already noticed, the order here begins at the top and goes downwards, what was last in order of time being first in order of mention. We need only recall Peter's bold words that 'all the prophets, as many as have spoken, have told of the days' of Christ, or Paul's sermon in the synagogue of Antioch in which he passionately insisted on the Jewish crime of condemning Christ as being the fulfilment of the voices of the prophets, and of the Resurrection of Jesus as being God's fulfilment of the promise made unto the fathers to understand how here, as it were, beneath the foundation laid by the present preaching of the apostles, Paul rejoices to discern the ancient stones firmly laid by long dead hands.

The Apostle's strongest conviction was that he him-

self had become more and not less of a Jew by becoming a Christian, and that the Gospel which he preached was nothing more than the perfecting of that Gospel before the Gospel, which had come from the lips of the prophets. We know a great deal more than he did as to the ways in which the progressive divine revelation was presented to Israel through the ages, and some of us are tempted to think that we know more than we do, but the true bearing of modern criticism, as applied to the Old Testament, is to confirm, even whilst it may to some extent modify, the conviction common to all the New Testament writers, and formulated by the last of the New Testament prophets, that 'the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.' Whatever new light may shine on the questions of the origin and composition of the books of the Old Testament, it will never obscure the radiance of the majestic figure of the Messiah which shines from the prophetic page. The inner relation between the foundation of the apostles and that of the prophets is best set forth in the solemn colloquy on the Mount of Transfiguration between Moses and Elias and Jesus. They 'were with Him' as witnessing to Him to whom law and ritual and prophecy had pointed, and they 'spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem' as being the vital centre of all His work which the lambs slain according to ritual had foreshadowed, and the prophetic figure of the Servant of the Lord 'wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities' had more distinctly foretold.

III. The corner-stone which underlies and unites the whole.

Of course the corner-stone here is the foundation-stone and not 'the head-stone of the corner.' Jesus

Christ is both. He is the first and the last; the Alpha and Omega. In accordance with the whole context, in which the prevailing idea is that which always fired Paul's imagination, viz. that of reconciling Jew and Gentile in one new man, it is best to suppose a reference here to the union of Jew and Gentile. The stone laid beneath the two walls which diverge at right angles from each other binds both together and gives strength and cohesion to the whole. In the previous context the same idea is set forth that Christ 'preached peace to them that were afar off (Gentiles) and to them that were nigh (Jews).' By His death He broke down another wall, the middle wall of partition between them, and did so by abolishing 'the law of commandments contained in ordinances.' The old distinction between Jew and Gentile, which was accentuated by the Jew's rigid observance of ordinances and which often led to bitter hatred on both sides, was swept away in that strange new thing, a community of believers drawn together in Jesus Christ. The former antagonistic 'twain' had become one in a third order of man, the Christian man. The Jew Christian and the Gentile Christian became brethren because they had received one new life, and they who had common feelings of faith and love to the same Saviour, a common character drawn from Him, and a common destiny open to them by their common relation to Jesus, could never cherish the old emotions of racial hate.

When we, in this day, try to picture to ourselves that strange new thing, the love which bound the early Christians together and buried as beneath a rushing flood the formidable walls of separation between them, we may well penitently ask ourselves how

it comes that Jesus seems to have so much less power to triumph over the divisive forces that part us from those who should be our hearts' brothers. In our modern life there are no such gulfs of separation from one another as were filled up unconsciously in the experience of the first believers, but the narrower chinks seem to remain in their ugliness between those who profess a common faith in one Lord, and who are all ready to assert that they are built on the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, and that Jesus Christ is from them the chief corner-stone.

If in reality He is so to us, and He is so if we have been builded upon Him through our faith, the metaphor of corner-stone and building will fail to express the reality of our relation to Him, for our corner-stone has in it an infinite vitality which rises up through all the courses of the living stones, and moulds each 'into an immortal feature of loveliness and perfection.' So it shall be for each individual, though here the appropriation of the perfect gift is imperfect. So it shall be in reference to the history of the world. Christ is its centre and foundation-stone, and as His coming makes the date from which the nations reckon, and all before it was in the deepest sense preparatory to His incarnation, all which is after it is in the deepest sense the appropriating of Him and the developing of His work. The multitudes which went before and that followed cried, saying, 'Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.'

‘THE WHOLE FAMILY’

‘The whole family in heaven and earth.’—EPH. iii. 15.

GRAMMATICALLY, we are driven to recognise that the Revised Version is more correct than the Authorised, when it reads ‘every family,’ instead of ‘the whole family.’ There is in the expression no reference to the thought, however true it is in itself, that the redeemed in heaven and the believers on earth make up but one family. The thought rather is, that, as has been said, ‘the father makes the family,’ and if any community of intelligent beings, human, or angelic, bears the great name of family, the great reason for that lies ‘in God’s paternal relationship.’

But my present purpose in selecting this text is not so much to speak of *it* as to lay hold of the probably incorrect rendering in the Authorised Version, as suggesting, though here inaccurately, the thought that believers struggling here and saints and angels glorious above ‘but one communion make,’ and in the light of that thought, to consider the meaning of the Lord’s Supper. I am, of course, fully conscious that in thus using the words, I am diverting them from their original purpose; but possibly in this case, open confession, *my* open confession, may merit your forgiveness and at all events, it, in some degree, brings me my own.

I. Consider the Lord’s Supper as a sign that the Church on earth is a family.

The Passover was essentially a family feast, and the Lord’s Supper, which was grafted on it, was plainly meant to be the same. The domestic character of the rite shines clearly out in the precious simplicity of the arrangements in the upper room. When Christ and

the twelve sat down there, it was a family meal at which they sat. He was the head of the household; they were members of His family. The early examples of the rite, when the disciples 'gathered together to break bread,' obviously preserved the same familiar character, and stand in extraordinary contrast to the splendours of high mass in a Roman Catholic Cathedral. The Church, as a whole, is a household, and the very form of the rite proclaims that 'we, being many, are one bread.' The conception of a family brings clearly into view the deepest ground of Christian unity. It is the possession of a common life, just as men are born into an earthly family, not of their own will, nor of their own working, and come without any action of their own into bonds of blood relationship with brothers and sisters. When we become sons of God and are born again, we become brethren of all His children. That which gives us life in Him makes us kindred with all through whose veins flows that same life. It is the common partaking in the one bread which makes us one. The same blood flows in the veins of all the children.

Hence, the only ground on which the Church rests is this common possession of the life of Christ, and that ground makes, and ought to be felt to make, Christian union a far deeper, more blessed, and more imperative bond than can be found in any shallow similarities of aim—or identities of opinion or feeling. The deepest fact of Christian consciousness is the foundation fact of Christian brotherhood; each is nearer to every Christian than to any besides. A very solemn view of Christian duty arises from these thoughts, familiar as they are:

'No distance breaks the tie of blood,
Brothers are brothers ever more,'

and every tongue is loud in condemnation of any man who is ashamed or afraid to recognise his brother and stand by him, whatever may be the difference in their worldly positions. 'Every one who loveth Him that begat, loveth Him also that is begotten of Him.'

II. The Lord's Supper as a prophecy of the family at home above.

The prophetic character was stamped on the first institution of the Lord's Supper by Christ's own words 'until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God,' and by His declaration that He appointed unto them a kingdom, that they might eat and drink at His table in His kingdom. We may also recall the mysterious feast spread on the shore of the lake, where, with obvious allusion both to his earlier miracles and to the sad hour in the upper room, he came 'and taketh the bread and gave it to them.' Blending these two together we get most blessed, though dim, thoughts of that future; they speak to us of an eternal home, an eternal feast, and an eternal society. We have to reverse not a few of the characteristics of the upper room in order to reach those of the table in the kingdom. The Lord's Supper was followed for Him by Gethsemane and Calvary, and for them by going out to betray and to deny and to forsake Him. From that better table there is no more going out. The servant comes in from the field, spent with toil and stained with many a splash, but the Master Himself comes forth and serves His servant.

In the eternal feast, which is spread above, the bread as well as the wine is new, even whilst it is old, for there will be disclosed new depths of blessing and power in the old Christ, and new draughts of joy and strength in the old wine which will make the feasters ay, in rapture and astonishment, to the Master of the

feast, 'Thou hast kept the good wine until now.' There and then all broken ties will be re-knit, all losses supplied, and no shadow of change, nor fear of exhaustion, pass across the calm hearts.

III. The Lord's Supper is a token of the present union of the two.

If it thus prophesies the perfectness of heaven, it also shows us how the two communities of earth and heaven are united. They, as we, live by derivation of the one life; they, as we, are fed and blessed by the one Lord. The occupations and thoughts of Christian life on earth and of the perfect life of Saints above are one. They look to Christ as we do, when we live as Christians, though the sun which is the light of both regions shows there a broader disc, and pours forth more fervid rays, and is never obscured by clouds, nor ever sets in night. Whether conscious of us or not, they are doing there, in perfect fashion, what we imperfectly attempt, and partially accomplish.

'The Saints on earth and all the Dead
But one communion make.'

Heaven and earth are equally mansions in the Father's house.

To the faith which realises this great truth, death dwindles to a small matter. The Lord's table has an upper and a lower level. Sitting at the lower, we may feel that those who have gone from our sides, and have left empty places which never can be filled, are gathered round Him in the upper half, and though a screen hangs between the two, yet the feast is one and the family is one. Singly our dear ones go, and singly we all shall go. The tablespread in the presence of enemies will be left vacant to its last place, and the

one spread above will be filled to its last place, and so shall we ever be with the Lord, and the unity which was always real be perfectly and permanently manifested at the last.

STRENGTHENED WITH MIGHT

‘That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man.’—EPH. iii. 16.

IN no part of Paul’s letters does he rise to a higher level than in his prayers, and none of his prayers are fuller of fervour than this wonderful series of petitions. They open out one into the other like some majestic suite of apartments in a great palace-temple, each leading into a loftier and more spacious hall, each drawing nearer the presence-chamber, until at last we stand there.

Roughly speaking, the prayer is divided into four petitions, of which each is the cause of the following and the result of the preceding—‘That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man’—that is the first. ‘In order that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith,’ ‘ye being rooted and grounded in love’—such is the second, the result of the first, and the preparation for the third. ‘That ye may be able to comprehend with all saints . . . and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge,’ such is the third, and all lead up at last to that wonderful desire beyond which nothing is possible—‘that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.’

I venture to contemplate dealing with these four petitions in successive sermons, in order, God helping

me, that I may bring before you a fairer vision of the possibilities of your Christian life than you ordinarily entertain. For Paul's prayer is God's purpose, and what He means with all who profess His name is that these exuberant desires may be fulfilled in them. So let us now listen to that petition which is the foundation of all, and consider that great thought of the divine strength-giving power which may be bestowed upon every Christian soul.

I. First, then, I remark that God means, and wishes, that all Christians should be strong by the possession of the Spirit of might.

It is a miserably inadequate conception of Christianity, and of the gifts which it bestows, and the blessings which it intends for men, when it is limited, as it practically is, by a large number—I might almost say the majority—of professing Christians to a simple means of altering their relation to the past, and to the broken law of God and of righteousness. Thanks be to His name! His great gift to the world begins in each individual case with the assurance that all the past is cancelled. He gives that blessed sense of forgiveness, which can never be too highly estimated unless it is forced out of its true place as the introduction, and made to be the climax and the end, of His gifts. I do not know what Christianity means, unless it means that you and I are forgiven for a purpose; that the purpose, if I may so say, is something in advance of the means towards the purpose, the purpose being that we should be filled with all the strength and righteousness and supernatural life granted to us by the Spirit of God.

It is well that we should enter into the vestibule. There is no other path to the throne but through the

vestibule. But do not let us forget that the good news of forgiveness, though we need it day by day, and need it perpetually repeated, is but the introduction to and porch of the Temple, and that beyond it there towers, if I cannot say a loftier, yet I may say a further gift, even the gift of a divine life like His, from whom it comes, and of which it is in reality an effluence and a spark. The true characteristic blessing of the Gospel is the gift of a new power to a sinful weak world; a power which makes the feeble strong, and the strongest as an angel of God.

Oh, brethren! we who know how, 'if any power we have, it is to ill'; we who understand the weakness, the unaptness of our spirits to any good, and our strength for every vagrant evil that comes upon them to tempt them, should surely recognise as a Gospel in very deed that which proclaims to us that the 'everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth,' who Himself 'fainteth not, neither is weary,' hath yet a loftier display of His strength-giving power than that which is visible in the heavens above, where, 'because He is strong in might not one faileth.' That heaven, the region of calm completeness, of law unbroken and therefore of power undiminished, affords a lesser and dimmer manifestation of His strength than the work that is done in the hell of a human heart that has wandered and is brought back, that is stricken with the weakness of the fever of sin, and is healed into the strength of obedience and the omnipotence of dependence. It is much to say 'for that He is strong in might, not one of these faileth,' it is more to say 'He giveth power to them that have failed; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength.' The Gospel is the gift of pardon for holiness, and its

inmost and most characteristic bestowment is the bestowment of a new power for obedience and service.

And that power, as I need not remind you, is given to us through the gift of the Divine Spirit. The very name of that Spirit is the 'Spirit of Might.' Christ spoke to us about being 'endued with power from on high.' The last of His promises that dropped from His lips upon earth was the promise that His followers should receive the power of the Spirit coming upon them. Wheresoever in the early histories we read of a man who was full of the Holy Ghost, we read that he was 'full of power.' According to the teaching of this Apostle, God hath given us the 'Spirit of power,' which is also the Spirit 'of love and of a sound mind.' So the strength that we must have, if we have strength at all, is the strength of a Divine Spirit, not our own, that dwells in us, and works through us.

And there is nothing in that which need startle or surprise any man who believes in a living God at all, and in the possibility, therefore, of a connection between the Great Spirit and all the human spirits which are His children. I would maintain, in opposition to many modern conceptions, the actual supernatural character of the gift that is bestowed upon every Christian soul. My reading of the New Testament is that as distinctly above the order of material nature as is any miracle, is the gift that flows into a believing heart. There is a direct passage between God and my spirit. It lies open to His touch; all the paths of its deep things can be trodden by Him. You and I act upon one another from without, He acts upon us within. We wish one another blessings; He gives the blessings. We try to train, to educate, to incline, and dispose, by the presentation of motives and the urging of reasons; He can

plant in a heart by His own divine husbandry the seed that shall blossom into immortal life. And so the Christian Church is a great, continuous, supernatural community in the midst of the material world; and every believing soul, because it possesses something of the life of Jesus Christ, has been the seat of a miracle as real and true as when He said 'Lazarus, come forth!' Precisely this teaching does our Lord Himself present for our acceptance when He sets side by side, as mutually illustrative, as belonging to the same order of supernatural phenomena, 'the hour is coming when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God and they that hear shall live,' which is the supernatural resurrection of souls dead in sin,—and 'the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth,' which is the future resurrection of the body, in obedience to His will.

So, Christian men and women, do you set clearly before you this: that God's purpose with you is but begun when He has forgiven you, that He forgives you for a design, that it is a means to an end, and that you have not reached the conception of the large things which He intends for you unless you have risen to this great thought—He means and wishes that you should be strong with the strength of His own Divine Spirit.

II. Now notice, next, that this Divine Power has its seat in, and is intended to influence the whole of, the inner life.

As my text puts it, we may be 'strengthened with might by His Spirit *in the inner man.*' By the 'inner man' I suppose, is not meant the new creation through faith in Jesus Christ which this Apostle calls 'the new

man,' but simply what Peter calls the 'hidden man of the heart,' the 'soul,' or unseen self as distinguished from the visible material body which it animates and informs. It is this inner self, then, in which the Spirit of God is to dwell, and into which it is to breathe strength. The leaven is hid deep in three measures of meal until the whole be leavened. And the point to mark is that the whole inward region which makes up the true man is the field upon which this Divine Spirit is to work. It is not a bit of your inward life that is to be hallowed. It is not any one aspect of it that is to be strengthened, but it is the whole intellect, affections, desires, tastes, powers of attention, conscience, imagination, memory, will. The whole inner man in all its corners is to be filled, and to come under the influence of this power, 'until there be no part dark, as when the bright shining of a candle giveth thee light.'

There is no part of my being that is not patent to the tread of this Divine Guest. There are no rooms of the house of my spirit into which He may not go. Let Him come with the master key in His hand into all the dim chambers of your feeble nature; and as the one life is light in the eye, and colour in the cheek, and deftness in the fingers, and strength in the arm, and pulsation in the heart, so He will come with the manifold results of the one gift to you. He will strengthen your understandings, and make you able for loftier tasks of intellect and of reason than you can face in your unaided power; He will dwell in your affections and make them vigorous to lay hold upon the holy things that are above their natural inclination, and will make it certain that their reach shall not be beyond their grasp, as, alas! it so often is in the sad-

ness and disappointments of human love. He will come into that feeble, vacillating, wayward will of yours, that is only obstinate in its adherence to the low and the evil, as some foul creature, that one may try to wrench away, digs its claws into corruption and holds on by that. He will lift your will and make it fix upon the good and abominate the evil, and through the whole being He will pour a great tide of strength which shall cover all the weakness. He will be like some subtle elixir which, taken into the lips, steals through a pallid and wasted frame, and brings back a glow to the cheek and a lustre to the eye, and swiftness to the brain, and power to the whole nature. Or as some plant, drooping and flagging beneath the hot rays of the sun, when it has the scent of water given to it, will, in all its parts, stiffen and erect itself, so, when the Spirit is poured out on men, their whole nature is invigorated and helped.

That indwelling Spirit will be a power for suffering. The parallel passage to this in the twin epistle to the Colossians is—‘strengthened with all might unto all patience and long-suffering with gentleness.’ Ah, brethren! unless this Divine Spirit were a power for patience and endurance it were no power suited to us poor men. So dark at times is every life; so full at times of discouragements, of dreariness, of sadness, of loneliness, of bitter memories, and of fading hopes does the human heart become, that if we are to be strong we must have a strength that will manifest itself most chiefly in this, that it teaches us how to bear, how to weep, how to submit.

And it will be a power for conflict. We have all of us, in the discharge of duty and in the meeting of temptation, to face such tremendous antagonisms that unless

we have grace given to us which will enable us to resist, we shall be overcome and swept away. God's power given by the Divine Spirit does not absolve us from the fight, but it fits us for the fight. It is not given in order that, holiness may be won without a struggle, as some people seem to think, but it is given to us in order that in the struggle for holiness we may never lose 'one jot of heart or hope,' but may be 'able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand.'

It is a power for service. 'Tarry ye in Jerusalem till ye be endued with power from on high.' There is no such force for the spreading of Christ's Kingdom, and the witness-bearing work of His Church, as the possession of this Divine Spirit. Plunged into that fiery baptism, the selfishness and the sloth, which stand in the way of so many of us, are all consumed and annihilated, and we are set free for service because the bonds that bound us are burnt up in the merciful furnace of His fiery power.

'Ye shall be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man'—a power that will fill and flood all your nature if you will let it, and will make you strong to suffer, strong to combat, strong to serve, and to witness for your Lord.

III. And now, lastly, let me point you still further to the measure of this power. It is limitless with the boundlessness of God Himself. 'That he would grant you' is the daring petition of the Apostle, 'according to the riches of His glory to be strengthened.'

There is the measure. There is no limit except the uncounted wealth of His own self-manifestation, the flashing light of revealed divinity. Whatsoever there is of splendour in that, whatsoever there is of power

there, in these and in nothing on this side of them, lies the limit of the possibilities of a Christian life. Of course there is a working limit at each moment, and that is our capacity to receive; but that capacity varies, may vary indefinitely, may become greater and greater beyond our count or measurement. Our hearts may be more and more capable of God; and in the measure in which they are capable of Him they shall be filled by Him. A limit which is always shifting is no limit at all. A kingdom, the boundaries of which are not the same from one year to another, by reason of its own inherent expansive power, may be said to have no fixed limit. And so we appropriate and enclose, as it were, within our own little fence, a tiny portion of the great prairie that rolls boundlessly to the horizon. But to-morrow we may enclose more, if we will, and more and more; and so ever onwards, for all that is God's is ours, and He has given us His whole self to use and to possess through our faith in His Son. A thimble can only take up a thimbleful of the ocean, but what if the thimble be endowed with a power of expansion which has no term known to men? May it not, then, be that some time or other it shall be able to hold so much of the infinite depth as now seems a dream too audacious to be realised?

So it is with us and God. He lets us come into the vaults, as it were, where in piles and masses the ingots of uncoined and uncounted gold are stored and stacked; and He says, 'Take as much as you like to carry.' There is no limit except the riches of His glory.

And now, dear friends, remember that this great gift, offered to each of us, is offered on conditions. To you professing Christians especially I speak. You will never get it unless you want it, and some of you do not

want it. There are plenty of people who call themselves Christian men that would not for the life of them know what to do with this great gift if they had it. You will get it if you desire it. 'Ye have not because ye ask not.'

Oh! when one contrasts the largeness of God's promises and the miserable contradiction to them which the average Christian life of this generation presents, what can we say? 'Hath His mercy clean gone for ever? Doth His promise fail for evermore?' Ye weak Christian people, born weakling and weak ever since, as so many of you are, open your mouths wide. Rise to the height of the expectations and the desires which it is our sin not to cherish; and be sure of this, as we ask so shall we receive. 'Ye are not straitened in God.' Alas! alas! 'ye are straitened in yourselves.'

And mind, there must be self-suppression if there is to be the triumph of a divine power in you. You cannot fight with both classes of weapons. The human must die if the divine is to live. The life of nature, dependence on self, must be weakened and subdued if the life of God is to overcome and to fill you. You must be able to say 'Not I!' or you will never be able to say 'Christ liveth in me.' The patriarch who overcame halted on his thigh; and all the life of nature was lamed and made impotent that the life of grace might prevail. So crush self by the power and for the sake of the Christ, if you would that the Spirit should bear rule over you.

See to it, too, that you use what you have of that Divine Spirit. 'To him that hath shall be given.' What is the use of more water being sent down the mill lade, if the water that does come in it all runs

away at the bottom, and none of it goes over the wheel? Use the power you have, and power will come to the faithful steward of what he possesses. He that is faithful in a little shall get much to be faithful over. Ask and use, and the ancient thanksgiving may still come from your lips. 'In the day when I cried, Thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul.'

THE INDWELLING CHRIST

'That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; ye being rooted and grounded in love.'—EPH. iii. 17.

WE have here the second step of the great staircase by which Paul's fervent desires for his Ephesian friends climbed towards that wonderful summit of his prayers—which is ever approached, never reached,—'that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.'

Two remarks of an expository character will prepare the way for the lessons of these verses. The first is as to the relation of this clause to the preceding. It might appear at first sight to be simply parallel with the former, expressing substantially the same ideas under a somewhat different aspect. The operation of the strength-giving Spirit in the inner man might very naturally be supposed to be equivalent to the dwelling of Christ in our hearts by faith. So many commentators do, in fact, take it; but I think that the two ideas may be distinguished, and that we are to see in the words of our text, as I have said, the second step in this prayer, which is in some sense a result of the 'strengthening with might by the Spirit in the inner man.' I need not enter in detail into the reasons for

taking this view of the connection of the clause, which is obviously in accordance with the climbing-up structure of the whole verse. It is enough to point it out as the basis of my further remarks.

And now the second observation with which I will trouble you, before I come to deal with the thoughts of the verse, is as to the connection of the last words of it. You may observe that in reading the words of my text I omitted the 'that' which stands in the centre of the verse. I did so because the words, 'Ye being rooted and grounded in love,' in the original, do stand before the '*that*,' and are distinctly separated by it from the subsequent clause. They ought not, therefore, to be shifted forward into it, as our translators and the Revised Version have, I think, unfortunately done, unless there were some absolute necessity either from meaning or from construction. I do not think that this is the case; but on the contrary, if they are carried forward into the next clause, which describes the result of Christ's dwelling in our hearts by faith, they break the logical flow of the sentence by mixing together result and occasion. And so I attach them to the first part of this verse, and take them to express at once the consequence of Christ's dwelling in the heart by faith, and the preparation or occasion for our being able to comprehend and know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge. Now that is all with which I need trouble you in the way of explanation of the meaning of the words. Let us come now to deal with their substance.

I. Consider the Indwelling of Christ, as desired by the Apostle for all Christians.

To begin with, let me say in the plainest, simplest, strongest way that I can, that that dwelling of Christ

in the believing heart is to be regarded as being a plain literal fact.

To a man who does not believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ, of course that is nonsense, but to those of us who do see in Him the manifested incarnate God, there ought to be no difficulty in accepting this as the simple literal force of the words before us, that in every soul where faith, howsoever feeble, has been exercised, there Jesus Christ does verily abide.

It is not to be weakened down into any notion of participation in His likeness, sympathy with His character, submission to His influence, following His example, listening to His instruction, or the like. A dead Plato may so influence his followers, but that is not how a living Christ influences His disciples. What is meant is no mere influence derived but separable from Him, however blessed and gracious that influence might be, but it is the presence of His own self, exercising influences which are inseparable from His presence, and only to be realised when He dwells in us.

I think that Christian people as a rule do far too little turn their attention to this aspect of the Gospel teaching, and concentrate their thoughts far too much upon that which is unspeakably precious in itself, but does not exhaust all that Christ is to us, viz. the work that He wrought for us upon Calvary; or to take a step further, the work that He is now carrying on for us as our Intercessor and Advocate in the heavens. You who listen to me Sunday after Sunday will not suspect me of seeking to minimise either of these two aspects of our Lord's mission and operation, but I do believe that very largely the glad thought of an indwelling Christ, who actually abides and works in our hearts, and is not only for us in the heavens, or

with us by some kind of impalpable and metaphorical presence, but in simple, that is to say, in spiritual reality is in our spirits, has faded away from the consciousness of the Christian Church.

And so we are called 'mystics' when we preach Christ in the heart. Ah, brother! unless your Christianity be in the good deep sense of the word 'mystical,' it is mechanical, which is worse. I preach, and rejoice that I have to preach, a 'Christ that died, yea! rather that is risen again; who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.' Nor do I stop there, but I preach a Christ that is in us, dwelling in our hearts if we be His at all.

Well, then, further observe that the special emphasis of the prayer here is that this 'indwelling' may be an unbroken and permanent one. Any of you who can consult the original for yourselves will see that the Apostle here uses a compound word which conveys the idea of intensity and continuity. What he desires, then, is not merely that these Ephesian Christians may have occasional visits of the indwelling Lord, or that at some lofty moments of spiritual enthusiasm they may be conscious that He is with them, but that always, in an unbroken line of deep, calm receptiveness, they may possess, and know that they possess, an indwelling Saviour.

And this, I think, is one of the reasons why we may and must distinguish between the apparently very similar petition in the previous verse, about which we spoke in the last sermon, and the petition which is now occupying us; for, as I shall have to show you, it is only as 'strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man,' that we are capable of the continuous abiding of that Lord within us.

Oh! what a contrast to that idea of a perpetual unbroken inhabitation of Jesus in our spirits and to our consciousness is presented by our ordinary life! 'Why shouldst Thou be as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night?' may well be the utterance of the average Christian. We might, with unbroken blessedness, possess Him in our hearts, and instead, we have only 'visits short and far between.' Alas, alas, how often do we drive away that indwelling Christ, because our hearts are 'foul with sin,' so that He

'Can but listen at the gate

And hear the household jar within.'

Christian men and women! here is the ideal of our lives, capable of being approximated to (if not absolutely in its entirety reached) with far more perfection than it ever has yet been by us. There might be a line of light never interrupted running all through our religious experience. Instead of that there is a light point here, and a great gap of darkness there, like the straggling lamps by the wayside in the half-lighted squalid suburbs of some great city. Is that your Christian life, broken by many interruptions, and having often sounding through it the solemn words of the retreating divinity which the old profound legend tells us were heard the night before the Temple on Zion was burnt:—'Let us depart?' 'I will arise and return unto My place till they acknowledge their offences.' God means and wishes that Christ may continuously dwell in our hearts. Does He to your own consciousness dwell in yours?

And then the last thought connected with this first part of my subject is that the heart, strengthened by the Spirit, is fitted to be the Temple of the indwelling Christ. How shall we prepare the chamber for such

a guest? How shall some poor occupant of some wretched hut by the wayside fit it up for the abode of a prince? The answer lies in these words that precede my text. You cannot strengthen the rafters and lift the roof and adorn the halls and furnish the floor in a manner befitting the coming of the King; but you can turn to that Divine Spirit who will expand and embellish and invigorate your whole spirit, and make it capable of receiving the indwelling Christ.

That these two things which are here considered as cause and effect may, in another aspect, be considered as but varying phases of the same truth, is only part of the depth and felicity of the teaching that is here; for if you come to look more deeply into it, the Spirit that strengtheneth with might is the Spirit of Christ; and He dwells in men's hearts by His own Spirit. So that the apparent confusion, arising from what in other places are regarded as identical being here conceived as cause and effect, is no confusion at all, but is explained and vindicated by the deep truth that nothing but the indwelling of the Christ can fit for the indwelling of the Christ. The lesser gift of His presence prepares for the greater measure of it; the transitory inhabitation for the more permanent. Where He comes in smaller measure He opens the door and makes the heart capable of His own more entire indwelling. 'Unto him that hath shall be given.' It is Christ in the heart that makes the heart fit for Christ to dwell in the heart. You cannot do it by your own power; turn to Him and let Him make you temples meet for Himself.

II. So now, in the second place, notice the open door through which the Christ comes in to dwell—'that He may dwell in your hearts by faith.'

More accurately we may render 'through faith,' and might even venture to suppose that the thought of faith as an open door through which Christ passes into the heart, floated half distinctly before the Apostle's mind. Be that as it may, at all events faith is here represented as the means or condition through which this dwelling takes effect. You have but to believe in Him and He comes, drawn from heaven, floating down on a sunbeam, as it were, and enters into the heart and abides there.

Trust, which is faith, is self-distrust. 'I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit.' Rivers do not run on the mountain tops, but down in the valleys. So the heart that is lifted up and self-complacent has no dew of His blessing resting upon it, but has the curse of Gilboa adhering to its barrenness; but the low lands, the humble and the lowly hearts, are they in which the waters that go softly scoop their course and diffuse their blessings. Faith is self-distrust. Self-distrust brings the Christ.

Faith is desire. Never, never in the history of the world has it been or can it be that a longing towards Him shall be a longing thrown back unsatisfied upon itself. You have but to trust, and you possess. We open the door for the entrance of Christ by the simple act of faith, and blessed be His name! He can squeeze Himself through a very little chink, and He does not require that the gates should be flung wide open in order that, with some of His blessings, He may come in.

Mystical Christianity of the false sort has much to say about the indwelling of God in the soul, but it spoils all its teaching by insisting upon it that the condition on which God dwells in the soul is the soul's

purifying itself to receive Him. But you cannot cleanse your hearts so as to bring Christ into them, you must let Him come and cleanse them by the process of His coming, and fit them thereby for His own indwelling. And, assuredly, He will so come, purging us from our evil and abiding in our hearts.

But do not forget that the faith which brings Christ into the spirit must be a faith which works by love, if it is to keep Christ in the spirit. You cannot bring that Lord into your hearts by anything that you do. The man who cleanses his own soul by his own strength, and so expects to draw God into it, has made the mistake which Christ pointed out when He told us that when the unclean spirit is gone out of a man he leaves his house empty, though it be swept and garnished. Moral reformation may turn out the devils, it will never bring in God, and in the emptiness of the swept and garnished heart there is an invitation to the seven to come back again and fill it.

And whilst that is true, remember, on the other hand, that a Christian man can drive away his Master by evil works. The sweet song-birds and the honey-making bees are said always to desert a neighbourhood before a pestilence breaks out in it. And if I may so say, similarly quick to feel the first breath of the pestilence is the presence of the Christ which cannot dwell with evil. You bring Christ into your heart by faith, without any work at all; you keep Him there by a faith which produces holiness.

III. And the last point is the gifts of this indwelling Christ,—‘ye being,’ or as the words might more accurately be translated, ‘Ye having been rooted and grounded in love.’

Where He comes He comes not empty-handed. He

brings His own love, and that, consciously received, produces a corresponding and answering love in our hearts to Him. So there is no need to ask the question here whether 'love' means Christ's love to me, or my love to Christ. From the nature of the case both are included—the recognition of His love and the response by mine are the result of His entering into the heart. This love, the recognition of His and the response by mine, is represented in a lovely double metaphor in these words as being at once the soil in which our lives are rooted and grow, and the foundation on which our lives are built and are steadfast.

There is no need to enlarge upon these two things, but let me just touch them for a moment. Where Christ abides in a man's heart, love will be the very soil in which his life will be rooted and grow. That love will be the motive of all service, it will underlie, as its productive cause, all fruitfulness. All goodness and all beauty will be its fruit. The whole life will be as a tree planted in this rich soil. And so the life will grow not by effort only, but as by an inherent power drawing its nourishment from the soil. This is blessedness. It is heaven upon earth that love should be the soil in which our obedience is rooted, and from which we draw all the nutriment that turns to flowers and fruit.

Where Christ dwells in the heart, love will be the foundation upon which our lives are builded steadfast and sure. The blessed consciousness of His love, and the joyful answer of my heart to it, may become the basis upon which my whole being shall repose, the underlying thought that gives security, serenity, steadfastness to my else fluctuating life. I may so plant myself upon Him, as that in Him I shall be strong,

and then my life will not only grow like a tree and have its leaf green and broad, and its fruit the natural outcome of its vitality, but it will rise like some stately building, course by course, pillar by pillar, until at last the shining topstone is set there. He that buildeth on that foundation shall never be confounded.

For, remember that, deepest of all, the words of my text may mean that the Incarnate Personal Love becomes the very soil in which my life is set and blossoms, on which my life is founded.

‘Thou, my Life, O let me be
Rooted, grafted, built in Thee.’

Christ is Love, and Love is Christ. He that is rooted and grounded in love has the roots of his being, and the foundation of his life fixed and fastened in that Lord.

So, dear brethren, go to Christ like those two on the road to Emmaus; and as Fra Angelico has painted them on his convent wall, put out your hands and lay them on His, and say, ‘Abide with us. Abide with us!’ And the answer will come:—‘This is my rest for ever; here’—mystery of love!—‘will I dwell, for I have desired it,’ even the narrow room of your poor heart.

LOVE UNKNOWNABLE AND KNOWN

‘That ye . . . may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.’—EPH. iii. 18, 19.

THIS constitutes the third of the petitions in this great prayer of Paul’s, each of which, as we have had occasion to see in former sermons, rises above, and is a

consequence of the preceding, and leads on to, and is a cause or occasion of the subsequent one.

The two former petitions have been for inward strength communicated by a Divine Spirit, in order that Christ may dwell in our hearts, and so we may be rooted and grounded in love. The result of these desires being realised in our hearts is here set forth in two clauses which are substantially equivalent in meaning. 'To comprehend' may be taken as meaning nearly the same as 'to know,' only that perhaps the former expresses an act more purely intellectual. And, as we shall see in our next sermon, 'the breadth and length and depth and height' are the unmeasurable dimensions of the love which in the second clause is described as 'passing knowledge.' I purpose to deal with these measures in a separate discourse, and, therefore, omit them from consideration now.

We have, then, mainly two thoughts here, the one, that only the loving heart in which Christ dwells can know the love of Christ; and the other that even that heart can *not* know the love of Christ. The paradox is intentional, but it is intelligible. Let me deal then, as well as I can, with these two great thoughts.

I. First, we have this thought that only the loving heart can know Christ's love.

Now the Bible uses that word *know* to express two different things; one which we call mere intellectual perception; or to put it into plainer words, mere head knowledge such as a man may have about any subject of study, and the other a deep and living experience which is possession before it is knowledge, and knowledge because it is possession.

Now the former of these two, the knowledge which is merely the work of the understanding, is, of course,

independent of love. A man may know all about Christ and His love without one spark of love in his heart. And there are thousands of people who, as far as the mere intellectual understanding is concerned, know as much about Jesus Christ and His love as the saint who is closest to the Throne, and yet have not one trace of love to Christ in them. That is the kind of people that a widely diffused Christianity and a habit of hearing sermons produce. There are plenty of them, and some of us among them, who, as far as their heads are concerned, know quite as much of Jesus Christ and His love as any of us do, and could talk about it and argue about it, and draw inferences from it, and have the whole system of evangelical Christianity at their fingers' ends. Ay! It is at their fingers' ends, it never gets any nearer them than that.

There is a knowledge with which love has nothing to do, and it is a knowledge that for many people is quite sufficient. 'Knowledge puffeth up,' says the Apostle; into an unwholesome bubble of self-complacency that will one day be pricked and disappear, but 'love buildeth up'—a steadfast, slowly-rising, solid fabric. There be two kinds of knowledge: the mere rattle of notions in a man's brain, like the seeds of a withered poppy-head; very many, very dry, very hard; that will make a noise when you shake them. And there is another kind of knowledge which goes deep down into the heart, and is the only knowledge worth calling by the name; and that knowledge is the child, as my text has it, of love.

Now let us think about that for a moment. Love, says Paul, is the parent of all knowledge. Well, now, can we find any illustrations from similar facts in other regions? Yes! I think so. How do we know, really

know, any emotions of any sort whatever? Only by experience. You may talk for ever about feelings, and you teach nothing about them to those who have not experienced them. The poets of the world have been singing about love ever since the world began. But no heart has learned what love is from even the sweetest and deepest songs. Who that is not a father can be taught paternal love by words, or can come to a perception of it by an effort of mind? And so with all other emotions. Only the lips that have drunk the cup of sweetness or of bitterness can tell how sweet or how bitter it is, and even when they, made wise by experience, speak out their deepest hearts, the listeners are but little the wiser, unless they too have been scholars in the same school. Experience is our only teacher in matters of feeling and emotion, as in the lower regions of taste and appetite. A man must be hungry to know what hunger is; he must taste honey or wormwood in order to know the taste of honey or wormwood, and in like manner he cannot know sorrow but by feeling its ache, and must love if he would know love. Experience is our only teacher, and her school-fees are heavy.

Just as a blind man can never be made to understand the glories of sunrise, or the light upon the far-off mountains; just as a deaf man may read books about acoustics, but they will not give him a notion of what it is to hear Beethoven, so we must have love to Christ before we know what love to Christ is, and we must consciously experience the love of Christ ere we know what the love of Christ is. We must have love to Christ in order to have a deep and living possession of love of Christ, though reciprocally it is also true that we must have the love of Christ known and felt by our

answering hearts, if we are ever to love Him back again.

So in all the play and counterplay of love between Christ and us, and in all the reaction of knowledge and love this remains true, that we must be rooted and grounded in love ere we can know love, and must have Christ dwelling in our hearts, in order to that deep and living possession which, when it is conscious of itself, is knowledge, and is for ever alien to the loveless heart.

‘He must be loved, ere that to you
He will seem worthy of your love.’

If you want to know the blessedness of the love of Christ, love Him, and open your hearts for the entrance of His love to you. Love is the parent of deep, true knowledge.

Of course, before we can love an unseen person and believe in his love, we must know about him by the ordinary means by which we learn about all persons outside the circle of our sight. So before the love which is thus the parent of deep, true knowledge, there must be the knowledge by study and credence of the record concerning Christ, which supplies the facts on which alone love can be nourished. The understanding has its part to play in leading the heart to love, and then the heart becomes the true teacher. He that loveth, knoweth God, for God is love. He that is rooted and grounded in love because Christ dwells in his heart, will be strengthened to know the love in which he is rooted. The Christ within us will know the love of Christ. We must first ‘taste,’ and then we shall ‘see’ that the Lord is good, as the Psalmist puts it with deep truth. First, the appropriation and feeding upon God, then the clear perception by the mind of the

sweetness in the taste. First the enjoyment; then the reflection on the enjoyment. First the love; and then the consciousness of the love of Christ possessed and the love to Christ experienced. The heart must be grounded in love that the man may know the love which passeth knowledge.

Then notice that there is also here another condition for this deep and blessed knowledge laid down in these words, 'That ye may be able to comprehend *with all saints.*' That is to say, our knowledge of the love of Jesus Christ depends largely on our sanctity. If we are pure we shall know. If we were wholly devoted to Him we should wholly know His love to us, and in the measure in which we are pure and holy we shall know it. This heart of ours is like a reflecting telescope, the least breath upon the mirror of which will cause all the starry sublimities that it should shadow forth to fade and become dim. The slightest moisture in the atmosphere, though it be quite imperceptible where we stand, will be dense enough to shut out the fair, shining, snowy summits that girdle the horizon and to leave nothing visible but the lowliness and commonplaceness of the prosaic plain.

If you want to know the love of Christ, first of all, that love must purify your souls. But then you must keep your souls pure, assured of this, that only the single eye is full of light, and that they who are not 'saints' grope in the dark even at midday, and whilst drenched by the sunshine of His love, are unconscious of it altogether. And so we get that miserable and mysterious tragedy of men and women walking through life, as many of you are doing, in the very blaze and focus of Christ's love, and never beholding it nor knowing anything about it.

Observe again the beginning of this path of knowledge, which we have thus traced. There must be, says my text, an indwelling Christ, and so an experience, deep and stable, of His love, and then we shall know the love which we thus experience. But how comes that indwelling? That is the question for us. The knowledge of His love is blessedness, is peace, is love, is everything; as we shall see in considering the last stage of this prayer. That knowledge arises from our fellowship with and our possession of the love of God, which is in Jesus Christ. How does that fellowship with, and possession of the love of God in Jesus Christ, come? That is the all-important question. What is the beginning of everything? 'That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith.' There is the gate through which you and I may come, and by which we must come if we are to come at all into the possession and perception of Christ's great love. Here is the path of knowledge. First of all, there must be the simple historical knowledge of the facts of Christ's life and death for us, with the Scripture teaching of their meaning and power. And then we must turn these truths from mere notions into life. It is not enough to know the love that God has to us, in that lower sense of the word 'knowledge.' Many of you know that, who never got any blessing out of it all your days, and never will, unless you change. Besides the 'knowing' there must be the 'believing' of the love. You must translate the notion into a living fact in your experience. You must pass from the simple work of understanding the Gospel to the higher act of faith. You must not be contented with knowing, you must trust. And if you have done that all the rest will follow, and the little, narrow, low doorway of humble self-distrust-

ing faith, through which a man creeps on his knees, leaving outside all his sin and his burden, opens out into the temple palace—the large place in which Christ's love is imparted to the soul.

Brethren, this doctrine of my text ought to be for every one of us a joy and a gospel. There is no royal road into the sweetness and the depth of Christ's love, for the wise or the prudent. The understanding is no more the organ for apprehending the love of Christ than the ear is the organ for perceiving light, or the heart the organ for learning mathematics. Blessed be God! the highest gifts are not bestowed upon the clever people, on the men of genius and the gifted ones, the cultivated and the refined, but they are open for all men; and when we say that love is the parent of knowledge, and that the condition of knowing the depths of Christ's heart is simple love which is the child of faith, we are only saying in other words what the Master embodied in His thanksgiving prayer, 'I thank Thee, Father! Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.'

And that is so, not because Christianity, being a foolish system, can only address itself to fools; not because Christianity, contradicting wisdom, cannot expect to be received by the wise and the cultured, but because a man's brains have as little to do with his trustful acceptance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as a man's eyes have to do with his capacity of hearing a voice. Therefore, seeing that the wise and prudent, and the cultured, and the clever, and the men of genius are always the minority of the race, let us vulgar folk that are neither wise, nor clever, nor cultured, nor geniuses, be thankful that all that has nothing to do

with our power of knowing and possessing the best wisdom and the highest treasures, but that upon this path the wayfaring man though a fool shall not err, and all narrow foreheads and limited understandings, and poor, simple uneducated people as well as philosophers and geniuses have to learn love by their hearts and not by their heads, and by a sense of need and a humble trust and a daily experience have to appropriate and suck out the blessing that lies in the love of Jesus Christ. Blessed be His name! The end of all aristocracies of culture and superciliousness of intellect lies in that great truth that we possess the deepest knowledge and highest wisdom when we love and by our love.

II. Now a word in the next place as to the other thought here, that not even the loving heart can know the love of Christ.

'It passeth knowledge,' says my text. Now I do not suppose that the paradox here of knowing the love of Christ which 'passeth knowledge' is to be explained by taking 'know' and 'knowledge' in the two different senses which I have already referred to, so as that we may experience, and know by conscious experience, that love which the mere understanding is incapable of grasping. That of course is an explanation which might be defended, but I take it that it is much truer to the Apostle's meaning to suppose that he uses the words 'know' and 'knowledge' both times in the same sense. And so we get familiar thoughts which I touch upon very briefly.

Our knowledge of Christ's love, though real, is incomplete, and must always be so. You and I believe, I hope, that Christ's love is not a man's love, or at least that it is more than a man's love. We believe that it is the flowing out to us of the love of God,

that all the fulness of the divine heart pours itself through that narrow channel of the human nature of our Lord, and therefore that the flow is endless and the Fountain infinite.

I suppose I do not need to show you that it is possible for people to have, and that in fact we do possess a real, a valid, a reliable knowledge of that which is infinite; although we possess, as a matter of course, no adequate and complete knowledge of it. But I only remind you that we have before us in Christ's love something which, though the understanding is not by itself able to grasp it, yet the understanding led by the heart can lay hold of, and can find in it infinite treasures. We can lay our poor hands on His love as a child might lay its tiny palm upon the base of some great cliff, and hold that love in a real grasp of a real knowledge and certitude, but we cannot put our hands round it and feel that we comprehend as well as apprehend. Let us be thankful that we cannot.

His love can only become to us a subject of knowledge as it reveals itself in its manifestations. Yet after even these manifestations it remains unuttered and unutterable even by the Cross and grave, even by the glory and the throne. 'It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea.'

We have no measure by which we can translate into the terms of our experience, and so bring within the grasp of our minds, what was the depth of the step, which Christ took at the impulse of His love, from the Throne to the Cross. We know not what He forewent; we know not, nor ever shall know, what depths of darkness and soul-agony He passed through at the

bidding of His all-enduring love to us. Nor do we know the consequences of that great work of emptying Himself of His glory. We have no means by which we can estimate the darkness and the depth of the misery from which we have been delivered, nor the height and the radiance of the glory to which we are to be lifted. And until we can tell and measure by our compasses both of these two extremes of possible human fate, till we have gone down into the deepest abyss of a bottomless pit of growing alienation and misery, and up above the highest reach of all unending progress into light and glory and God-likeness, we have not stretched our compasses wide enough to touch the two poles of this great sphere, the infinite love of Jesus Christ. So we bow before it, we know that we possess it with a knowledge more sure and certain, more deep and valid, than our knowledge of ought but ourselves; but yet it is beyond our grasp, and towers above us inaccessible in the altitude of its glory, and stretches deep beneath us in the profundity of its condescension.

And, in like manner, we may say that this known love passes knowledge, inasmuch as our experience of it can never exhaust it. We are like the settlers on some great island continent—as, for instance, on the Australian continent for many years after its first discovery—a thin fringe of population round the seaboard here and there, and all the bosom of the land untraversed and unknown. So after all experiences of and all blessed participation in the love of Jesus Christ which come to each of us by our faith, we have but skimmed the surface, but touched the edges, but received a drop of what, if it should come upon us in fulness of flood like a Niagara of love, would overwhelm our spirits.

So we have within our reach not only the treasure of creatural affections which bring gladness into life when they come, and darkness over it when they depart; we have not only human love which, if I may so say, is always lifting its finger to its lips in the act of bidding us adieu; but we may possess a love which will abide with us for ever. Men die, Christ lives. We can exhaust men, we cannot exhaust Christ. We can follow other objects of pursuit, all of which have limitation to their power of satisfying and pall upon the jaded sense sooner or later, or sooner or later are wrenched away from the aching heart. But here is a love into which we can penetrate very deep and fear no exhaustion; a sea into which we can cast ourselves, nor dread that like some rash diver flinging himself into shallow water where he thought there was depth, we may be bruised and wounded. We may find in Christ the endless love that an immortal heart requires. Enter by the low door of faith, and your finite heart will have the joy of an infinite love for its possession, and your mortal life will rise transfigured into an immortal and growing participation in the immortal Love of the indwelling and inexhaustible Christ.

THE PARADOX OF LOVE'S MEASURE

'The breadth, and length, and depth, and height.'—EPH. III. 18

OF what? There can, I think, be no doubt as to the answer. The next clause is evidently the continuation of the idea begun in that of our text, and it runs: 'And to know the *love of Christ* which passeth knowledge.' It is the immeasurable measure, then; the boundless

bounds and dimensions of the love of Christ which fire the Apostle's thoughts here. Of course, he had no separate idea in his mind attaching to each of these measures of magnitude, but he gathered them together simply to express the one thought of the greatness of Christ's love. Depth and height are the same dimension measured from opposite ends. The one begins at the top and goes down, the other begins at the bottom and goes up, but the distance is the same in either case. So we have the three dimensions of a solid here—breadth, length, and depth.

I suppose that I may venture to use these expressions with a somewhat different purpose from that for which the Apostle employs them; and to see in each of them a separate and blessed aspect of the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

I. What, then, is the breadth of that love?

It is as broad as humanity. As all the stars lie in the firmament, so all creatures rest in the heaven of His love. Mankind has many common characteristics. We all suffer, we all sin, we all hunger, we all aspire, hope, and die; and, blessed be God! we all occupy precisely the same relation to the divine love which lies in Jesus Christ. There are no step-children in God's great family, and none of them receives a more grudging or a less ample share of His love and goodness than every other. Far-stretching as the race, and curtaining it over as some great tent may enclose on a festal day a whole tribe, the breadth of Christ's love is the breadth of humanity.

And it is universal because it is divine. No human mind can be stretched so as to comprehend the whole of the members of mankind, and no human heart can be so emptied of self as to be capable of this absolute

universality and impartiality of affection. But the intellectual difficulties which stand in the way of the width of our affections, and the moral difficulties which stand still more frowningly and forbiddingly in the way, have no power over that love of Christ's which is close and tender, and clinging with all the tenderness and closeness and clingingness of a human affection, and lofty and universal and passionless and perpetual, with all the height and breadth and calmness and eternity of a divine heart.

And this broad love, broad as humanity, is not shallow because it is broad. Our love is too often like the estuary of some great stream which runs deep and mighty as long as it is held within narrow banks, but as soon as it widens becomes slow and powerless and shallow. The intensity of human affection varies inversely as its extension. A universal philanthropy is a passionless sentiment. But Christ's love is deep though it is wide, and suffers no diminution because it is shared amongst a multitude. It is like the great feast that He Himself spread for five thousand men, women, and children, all seated on the grass, 'and they did all eat and were filled.'

The whole love is the property of each recipient of it. He does not love as we do, who give a part of our heart to this one and a part to that one, and share the treasure of our affections amongst a multitude. All this gift belongs to every one, just as all the sunshine comes to every eye, and as every beholder sees the moon's path across the dark waters, stretching from the place where He stands to the centre of light.

This broad love, universal as humanity, and deep as it is broad, is universal because it is individual. You and I have to generalise, as we say, when we try to

extend our affections beyond the limits of household and family and personal friends, and the generalising is a sign of weakness and limitation. Nobody can love an abstraction, but God's love and Christ's love do not proceed in that fashion. He individualises, loving each and therefore loving all. It is because every man has a space in His heart singly and separately and conspicuously, that all men have a place there. So our task is to individualise this broad, universal love, and to say, in the simplicity of a glad faith, 'He loved me and gave Himself for me.' The breadth is world-wide, and the whole breadth is condensed into, if I may so say, a shaft of light which may find its way through the narrowest chink of a single soul. There are two ways of arguing about the love of Christ, both of them valid, and both of them needing to be employed by us. We have a right to say, 'He loves all, therefore He loves me.' And we have a right to say, 'He loves me, therefore He loves all.' For surely the love that has stooped to me can never pass by any human soul.

What is the breadth of the love of Christ? It is broad as mankind, it is narrow as myself.

II. Then, in the next place, what is the length of the love of Christ?

If we are to think of Him only as a man, however exalted and however perfect, you and I have nothing in the world to do with His love. When He was here on earth it may have been sent down through the ages in some vague way, as the shadowy ghost of love may rise in the heart of a great statesman or philanthropist for generations yet unborn, which He dimly sees will be affected by His sacrifice and service. But we do not call that love. Such a poor, pale, shadowy

thing has no right to the warm throbbing name; has no right to demand from us any answering thrill of affection. Unless you think of Jesus Christ as something more and other than the purest and the loftiest benevolence that ever dwelt in human form, I know of no intelligible sense in which the length of His love can be stretched to touch you.

If we content ourselves with that altogether inadequate and lame conception of Him and of His nature, of course there is no present bond between any man upon earth and Him, and it is absurd to talk about His present love as extending in any way to me. But we have to believe, rising to the full height of the Christian conception of the nature and person of Christ, that when He was here on earth the divine that dwelt in Him so informed and inspired the human as that the love of His man's heart was able to grasp the whole, and to separate the individuals who should make up the race till the end of time; so as that you and I, looking back over all the centuries, and asking ourselves what is the length of the love of Christ, can say, 'It stretches over all the years, and it reached then, as it reaches now, to touch me, upon whom the ends of the earth have come.' Its length is contemporaneous with the duration of humanity here or yonder.

That thought of eternal being, when we refer it to God, towers above us and repels us; and when we turn it to ourselves and think of our own life as unending, there come a strangeness and an awe that is almost shrinking, over the thoughtful spirit. But when we transmute it into the thought of a love whose length is unending, then over all the shoreless, misty, melancholy sea of eternity, there gleams a light, and every wavelet flashes up into glory. It is a dreadful thing

to think, 'For ever, Thou art God.' It is a solemn thing to think, 'For ever I am to be'; but it is life to say: 'O Christ! Thy love endureth from everlasting to everlasting; and because it lives, I shall live also'— 'Oh! give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endureth for ever.'

There is another measure of the length of the love of Christ. 'Master! How often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?—I say not unto thee until seven times, but until seventy times seven.' So said the Christ, multiplying perfection into itself twice—two sevens and a ten—in order to express the idea of boundlessness. And the law that He laid down for His servant is the law that binds Himself. What is the length of the love of Christ? Here is one measure of it—howsoever long drawn out my sin may be, this is longer; and the white line of His love runs out into infinity, far beyond the point where the black line of my sin stops. Anything short of eternal patience would have been long ago exhausted by your sins and mine, and our brethren's. But the pitying Christ, the eternal Lover of all wandering souls, looks down from heaven upon every one of us; goes with us in all our wanderings, bears with us in all our sins, in all our transgressions still is gracious. His pleadings sound on, like some stop in an organ continuously persistent through all the other notes. And round His throne are written the divine words which have been spoken about our human love modelled after His: 'Charity suffereth long and is kind; is not easily provoked, is not soon angry, beareth all things.' The length of the love of Christ is the length of eternity, and out-measures all human sin.

III. Then again, what is the depth of that love?

Depth and height, as I said at the beginning of these remarks, are but two ways of expressing the same dimension. For the one we begin at the top and measure down, for the other we begin at the bottom and measure up. The top is the Throne; and the downward measure, how is it to be stated? In what terms of distance are we to express it? How far is it from the Throne of the Universe to the manger of Bethlehem, and the Cross of Calvary, and the sepulchre in the garden? That is the depth of the love of Christ. Howsoever far may be the distance from that loftiness of co-equal divinity in the bosom of the Father, and radiant with glory, to the lowliness of the form of a servant, and the sorrows, limitations, rejections, pains and death—that is the measure of the depth of Christ's love. We can estimate the depth of the love of Christ by saying, 'He came from above, He tabernacled with us,' as if some planet were to burst from its track and plunge downwards in amongst the mist and the narrowness of our earthly atmosphere.

A well-known modern scientist has hazarded the speculation that the origin of life on this planet has been the falling upon it of the fragments of a meteor, or an aerolite from some other system, with a speck of organic life upon it, from which all has developed. Whatever may be the case in regard to physical life, that is absolutely true in the case of spiritual life. It all originates because this heaven-descended Christ has come down the long staircase of Incarnation, and has brought with Him into the clouds and oppressions of our terrestrial atmosphere a germ of life which He has planted in the heart of the race, there to spread for ever. That is the measure of the depth of the love of Christ.

And there is another way to measure it. My sins are deep, my helpless miseries are deep, but they are shallow as compared with the love that goes down beneath all sin, that is deeper than all sorrow, that is deeper than all necessity, that shrinks from no degradation, that turns away from no squalor, that abhors no wickedness so as to avert its face from it. The purest passion of human benevolence cannot but sometimes be aware of disgust mingling with its pity and its efforts, but Christ's love comes down to the most sunken. However far in the abyss of degradation any human soul has descended, beneath it are the everlasting arms, and beneath it is Christ's love. When a coalpit gets blocked up by some explosion, no brave rescuing party will venture to descend into the lowest depths of the poisonous darkness until some ventilation has been restored. But this loving Christ goes down, down, down into the thickest, most pestilential atmosphere, reeking with sin and corruption, and stretches out a rescuing hand to the most abject and undermost of all the victims. How deep is the love of Christ! The deep mines of sin and of alienation are all undermined and countermined by His love. Sin is an abyss, a mystery, how deep only they know who have fought against it; but

‘O love! thou bottomless abyss,
My sins are swallowed up in thee.’

‘I will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.’ The depths of Christ's love go down beneath all human necessity, sorrow, suffering, and sin.

IV. And lastly, what is the height of the love of Christ?

We found that the way to measure the depth was to

begin at the Throne, and go down to the Cross, and to the foul abysses of evil. The way to measure the height is to begin at the Cross and the foul abysses of evil, and to go up to the Throne. That is to say, the topmost thing in the Universe, the shining apex and pinnacle, glittering away up there in the radiant unsetting light, is the love of God in Jesus Christ. Other conceptions of that divine nature spring high above us and tower beyond our thoughts, but the summit of them all, the very topmost as it is the very bottommost, outside of everything, and therefore high above everything, is the love of God which has been revealed to us all, and brought close to us sinful men in the manhood and passion of our dear Christ.

And that love which thus towers above us, and gleams like the shining cross on the top of some lofty cathedral spire, does not flash up there inaccessible, nor lie before us like some pathless precipice, up which nothing that has not wings can ever hope to rise, but the height of the love of Christ is an hospitable height, which can be scaled by us. Nay, rather, that heaven of love which is 'higher than our thoughts,' bends down, as by a kind of optical delusion the physical heaven seems to do towards each of us, only with this blessed difference, that in the natural world the place where heaven touches earth is always the furthest point of distance from us; and in the spiritual world the place where heaven stoops to me is always right over my head, and the nearest possible point to me. He has come to lift us to Himself, and this is the height of His love, that it bears us, if we will, up and up to sit upon that throne where He Himself is enthroned.

So, brethren, Christ's love is round about us all, as

some sunny tropical sea may embosom in its violet waves a multitude of luxuriant and happy islets. So all of us, islanded on our little individual lives, lie in that great ocean of love, all the dimensions of which are immeasurable, and which stretches above, beneath, around, shoreless, tideless, bottomless, endless.

But, remember, this ocean of love you can shut out of your lives. It is possible to plunge a jar into mid-Atlantic, further than soundings have ever descended, and to bring it up on deck as dry inside as if it had been lying on an oven. It is possible for men and women—and I have them listening to me at this moment—to live and move and have their being in that sea of love, and never to have let one drop of its richest gifts into their hearts or their lives. Open your hearts for Him to come in, by humble faith in His great sacrifice for you. For if Christ dwell in your heart by faith, then and only then will experience be your guide; and you will be able to comprehend the boundless greatness, the endless duration, and absolute perfection, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.

THE CLIMAX OF ALL PRAYER

'That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.'—EPH. iii. 19.

THE Apostle's many-linked prayer, which we have been considering in successive sermons, has reached its height. It soars to the very Throne of God. There can be nothing above or beyond this wonderful petition. Rather, it might seem as if it were too much to ask, and as if, in the ecstasy of prayer, Paul had forgotten the limits that separate the creature from the Creator, as well as the experience of sinful and

imperfect men, and had sought to 'wind himself too high for mortal life beneath the sky.' And yet Paul's prayers are God's promises; and we are justified in taking these rapturous petitions as being distinct declarations of God's desire and purpose for each of us; as being the end which He had in view in the unspeakable gift of His Son; and as being the certain outcome of His gracious working on all believing hearts.

It seems at first a paradoxical impossibility; looked at more deeply and carefully it becomes a possibility for each of us, and therefore a duty; a certainty for all the redeemed in fullest measure hereafter; and, alas! a rebuke to our low lives and feeble expectations. Let us look, then, at the petition, with the desire of sounding, as we may, its depths and realising its preciousness.

I. First of all, think with me of the significance of this prayer.

'The fulness of God' is another expression for the whole sum and aggregate of all the energies, powers, and attributes of the divine nature, the total Godhead in its plenitude and abundance.

'God is love,' we say. What does that mean, but that God desires to impart His whole self to the creatures whom He loves? What is love in its lofty and purest forms, even as we see them here on earth; what is love except the infinite longing to bestow one's self? And when we proclaim that which is the summit and climax of the revelation of our Father in the person of His Son, and say with the last utterances of Scripture that 'God is love,' we do in other words proclaim that the very nature and deepest desire and purpose of the divine heart is to pour itself on the

emptiness and need of His lowly creatures in floods that keep back nothing. Lofty, wonderful, incomprehensible to the mere understanding as this thought may be, clearly it is the inmost meaning of all that Scripture tells us about God as being the 'portion of His people,' and about us, as being by Christ and in Christ 'heirs of God,' and possessors of Himself.

We have, then, as the promise that gleams from these great words, this wonderful prospect, that the divine love, truth, holiness, joy, in all their rich plenitude of all-sufficient abundance, may be showered upon us. The whole Godhead is our possession; for the fulness of God is no far-off remote treasure that lies beyond human grasp and outside of human experience. Do not we believe that, to use the words of this Apostle in another letter, 'it pleased the Father that in Him should all the fulness dwell'? Do we not believe that, to use the words of the same epistle, 'In Christ dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily'? Is not that abundance of the resources of the whole Deity insphered and incarnated in Jesus Christ our Lord, that it may be near us, and that we may put out our hand and touch it? This may be a paradox for the understanding, full of metaphysical puzzles and cobwebs, but for the heart that knows Christ, most true and precious. God is gathered into Jesus Christ, and all the fulness of God, whatever that may mean, is embodied in the Man Christ Jesus, that from Him it may be communicated to every soul that will.

For, to quote other words of another of the New Testament teachers, 'Of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace,' and to quote words in another part of the same epistle, we may 'all come to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the

fulness of Christ.' High above us, then, and inaccessible though that awful thought, 'the fulness of God,' may seem, as the zenith of the unscaleable heavens seems to us poor creatures creeping here upon the flat earth, it comes near, near, near, ever nearer, and at last tabernacles among us, when we think that in Him all the fulness dwells, and it comes nearer yet and enters into our hearts when we think that 'of His fulness have we all received.'

Then, still further, observe another of the words in this petition:—'That ye may be filled.' That is to say, Paul's prayer and God's purpose and desire concerning us is, that our whole being may be so saturated and charged with an indwelling divinity as that there shall be no room in our present stature and capacity for more, and no sense of want or aching emptiness.

Ah, brethren! when we think of how eagerly we have drunk at the stinking puddles of earth, and how after every draught there has yet been left a thirst that was pain, it is something for us to hear Him say:—'The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life,'—and 'he that drinketh of this water shall never thirst.' Our empty hearts, with their experiences of the insufficiency and the vanity of all earthly satisfaction, stand there like the water-pots at the rustic marriage, and the Master says, 'Fill them to the brim.' And then, by His touch, the water of our poor savourless, earthly enjoyments is transmuted and elevated into the new wine of His Kingdom. We may be filled, satisfied with the fulness of God.

There is another point as to the significance of this prayer, on which I must briefly touch. As our Revised Version will tell you, the literal rendering of my text

is, 'filled *unto*' (not exactly *with*) 'all the fulness of God'; which suggests the idea not of a completed work but of a process, and of a growing process, as if more and more of that great fulness might pass into a man. Suppose a number of vessels, according to the old illustration about degrees of glory in heaven; they are each full, but the quantity that one contains is much less than that which the other may hold. Add to the illustration that the vessels can grow, and that filling makes them grow; as a shrunken bladder when you pass gas into it will expand and round itself out, and all the creases will be smoothed away. Such is the Apostle's idea here, that a process of filling goes on which may satisfy the then desires, because it fills us up to the then capacities of our spirits; but in the very process of so filling and satisfying makes those spirits capable of containing larger measures of His fulness, which therefore flow into it. Such, as I take it, in rude and faint outline, is the significance of this great prayer.

II. Now turn, in the next place, to consider briefly the possibility of the accomplishments of this petition.

As I said, it sounds as if it were too much to desire. Certainly no wish can go beyond this wish. The question is, can a sane and humble wish go as far as this; and can a man pray such a prayer with any real belief that he will get it answered here and now? I say yes!

There are two difficulties that at once start up.

People will say, does such a prayer as this upon man's lips not forget the limits that bound the creature's capacity? Can the finite contain the Infinite?

Well, that is a verbal puzzle, and I answer, yes! The finite can contain the Infinite, if you are talking about two hearts that love, one of them God's and one of them

mine. We have got to keep very clear and distinct before our minds the broad, firm line of demarcation between the creature and the Creator, or else we get into a pantheistic region where both creature and Creator expire. But there is a Christian as well as an atheistic pantheism, and as long as we retain clearly in our minds the consciousness of the personal distinction between God and His child, so as that the child can turn round and say, 'I love Thee,' and God can look down and say, 'I bless thee'; then all identification and mutual indwelling and impartation from Him of Himself are possible, and are held forth as the aim and end of Christian life.

Of course in a mere abstract and philosophical sense the Infinite cannot be contained by the finite; and attributes which express infinity, like omnipresence and omniscience and omnipotence and so on, indicate things in God that we can know but little about, and that cannot be communicated. But those are not the divinest things in God. 'God is love.' Do you believe that that saying unveils the deepest things in Him? God is light, 'and in Him is no darkness at all.' Do you believe that His light and His love are nearer the centre than these attributes of power and infinitude? If we believe that, then we can come back to my text and say, 'The love, which is Thee, can come into me; the light, which is Thee, can pour itself into my darkness; the holiness, which is Thee, can enter into my impurity. The heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee. Thou dwellest in the humble and in the contrite heart.'

So, dear brethren, the old legends about mighty forms that contracted their stature and bowed their divine heads to enter into some poor man's hut, and

sit there, are simple Christian realities. And instead of puzzling ourselves with metaphysical difficulties which are mere shadows, and the work of the understanding or the spawn of words, let us listen to the Christ when He says, 'We will come unto him and make our abode with him,' and believe that it was no impossibility which fired the Apostle's hope when he prayed, and in praying prophesied, that we might be filled with all the fulness of God.

Then there is another difficulty that rises before our minds; and Christian men say, 'How is it possible, in this region of imperfection, compassed with infirmity and sin as we are, that such hopes should be realised for us here?' Well, I would rather answer that question by retorting and saying: 'How is it possible that such a prayer should have come from inspired lips unless the thing that Paul was asking might be?' Did he waste his breath when he thus prayed? Are we not as Christian men bound, instead of measuring our expectations by our attainments, to try to stretch our attainments to what are our legitimate expectations, and to hear in these words the answer to the faithless and unbelieving doubt whether such a thing is possible, and the assurance that it is possible.

An impossibility can never be a duty, and yet we are commanded: 'Be ye perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect.' An impossibility can never be a duty, and yet we are commanded to let Christ abide in our hearts.

Oh! if we believed less in the power of our sin it would have less power upon us. If we believed more in the power of an indwelling Christ He would have more power within us. If we said to ourselves, 'It is possible,' we should make it possible. The impossibility arises only from our own weakness, from our own

sinful weakness; and though it may be true, and is true, that none of us will live without sin as long as we abide here, it is also true that each moment of interruption of our communion with Christ and therefore each moment of interruption of that being 'filled with the fulness of God,' might have been avoided. We know about every such time that we could have helped it if we had liked, and it is no use bringing any general principles about sin cleaving to men in order to break the force of that conviction. But if that conviction be a real one, and if whenever a Christian man loses the consciousness of God in his heart, making him blessed, he is obliged to say: 'It was my own fault and Thou wouldst have stayed if I had chosen,' then there follows from this, that it is possible, notwithstanding all the imperfection and sin of earth, that we may be 'filled with all the fulness of God.'

So, dear brethren, take you this prayer as the standard of your expectations; and oh! take it as we must all take it, as the sharpest of rebukes to our actual attainments in holiness and in likeness to our Master. Set by the side of these wondrous and solemn words—'filled with the fulness of God,' the facts of the lives of the average professing Christians of this generation, and of this congregation; their emptiness, their ignorance of the divine indwelling, their want of anything in their experience that corresponds in the least degree to such words as these. Judge whether a man is not more likely to be bowed down in wholesome sense of his own sinfulness and unworthiness, if he has before him such an ideal as this of my text, than if it, too, has faded out of his life. I believe, for my part, that one great cause of the worldliness and the sinfulness and mechanical formalities that are eat-

ing the life out of the Christianity of this generation is the fact of the Church having largely lost any real belief in the possibility that Christian men may possess the fulness of God as their present experience. And so, when they do not find it in themselves they say: 'Oh! it is all right; it is the necessary result of our imperfect fleshly condition.' No! It is all wrong; and His purpose is that we should possess Him in the fulness of His gladdening and hallowing power, at every moment in our happy lives.

III. One word to close with, as to the means by which this prayer may be fulfilled.

Remember, it comes as the last link in a chain. I shall have wasted my breath for a month, as far as you are concerned, if you do not feel that the preceding links are needful before this can be attained.

But I only touch upon the nearest of them and remind you that it must be Christ dwelling in our hearts, that fills them with the fulness of God. Where He comes God comes. And where does He come? He comes where faith opens the door for Him. If you will trust Jesus Christ, if you will distrust yourselves, if you will turn your thoughts and your hearts to Him, if you will let Him come into your souls, and not shut Him out because your souls are so full that there is no room for Him there, then when He comes He will not come empty-handed, but will bring the full God-head with Him.

There must be the emptying of self, if there is to be the filling with God. And the emptying of self is realised in that faith which forsakes self-confidence, self-righteousness, self-dependence, self-control, self-pleasing, and yields itself wholly to the dear Lord.

There is another condition that is required, and that

is the previous link in this braided chain. The conscious experience of the love which is in Christ will bring to us 'the fulness of God.' Love is power; love is God; and when we live in the sense and experience of God's love to us then we have the power and we have the God. It is as in some of these petrifying streams, the water is charged with particles which it deposits upon everything that is laid in its course. So, if we plunge our hearts into that fountain of the love of Christ, as it flows it will clothe us with all the divine energies which are held in solution in the divinest thing in God—His own love. Plunged into the love we are filled with the fulness.

Then keep near your Master. It all comes to that. Meditate upon Him; do not let days pass, as they do pass, without a thought being turned to Him. Do not go about your daily work without a remembrance of Him. Keep yourselves in Christ. Seek to experience His love, that love which passeth knowledge, and is only known by them who possess it. And then, as the old painters with deep truth used to paint the Apostle of Love with a face like his Master, living near Christ and looking upon Him you will receive of His fulness, and 'we all, with open face, beholding the glory, shall be changed into the glory.'

MEASURELESS POWER AND ENDLESS GLORY

'Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, 21. Unto Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages. world without end. Amen.'
—EPH. iii. 20, 21.

ONE purpose and blessing of faithful prayer is to enlarge the desires which it expresses, and to make

us think more loftily of the grace to which we appeal. So the Apostle, in the wonderful series of supplications which precedes the text, has found his thought of what he may hope for his brethren at Ephesus grow greater with every clause. His prayer rises like some song-bird, in ever-widening sweeps, each higher in the blue, and nearer the throne; and at each a sweeter, fuller note.

‘Strengthened with might by His Spirit’; ‘that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith’; ‘that ye may be able to know the love of Christ’; ‘that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.’ Here he touches the very throne. Beyond that nothing can be conceived. But though that sublime petition may be the end of thought, it is not the end of faith. Though God can give us nothing more than it is, He can give us more than we think it to be, and more than we ask, when we ask this. Therefore the grand doxology of our text crowns and surpasses even this great prayer. The higher true prayer climbs, the wider is its view; and the wider is its view, the more conscious is it that the horizon of its vision is far within the borders of the goodly land. And as we gaze into what we can discern of the fulness of God, prayer will melt into thanksgiving and the doxology for the swift answer will follow close upon the last words of supplication. So is it here; so it may be always.

The form of our text then marks the confidence of Paul’s prayer. The exuberant fervour of his faith, as well as his natural impetuosity and ardour, comes out in the heaped-up words expressive of immensity and duration. He is like some archer watching, with parted lips, the flight of his arrow to the mark. He

is gazing on God confident that he has not asked in vain. Let us look with him, that we, too, may be heartened to expect great things of God. Notice then—

I. The measure of the power to which we trust.

This epistle is remarkable for its frequent references to the divine rule, or standard, or measure, in accordance with which the great facts of redemption take place. The 'things on the earth'—the historical processes by which salvation is brought to men and works in men—are ever traced up to the 'things in heaven'; the divine counsels from which they have come forth. That phrase, 'according to,' is perpetually occurring in this connection in the epistle. It is applied mainly in two directions. It serves sometimes to bring into view the ground, or reason, of the redemptive facts, as, for instance, in the expression that these take place 'according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself.' It serves sometimes to bring into view the measure by which the working of these redemptive facts is determined; as in our text, and in many other places.

Now there are three main forms under which this standard, or measure, of the Redeeming Power is set forth in this epistle, and it will help us to grasp the greatness of the Apostle's thought if we consider these.

Take, then, first, that clause in the earlier portion of the preceding prayer, 'that He would grant you according to the riches of His glory.' The measure, then, of the gift that we may hope to receive is the measure of God's own fulness. The 'riches of His glory' can be nothing less than the whole uncounted abundance of that majestic and far-shining Nature, as it pours itself

forth in the dazzling perfectness of its own Self-manifestation. And nothing less than this great treasure is to be the limit and standard of His gift to us. We are the sons of the King, and the allowance which He makes us even before we come to our inheritance is proportionate to our Father's wealth. The same stupendous thought is given us in that prayer, heavy with the blessed weight of unspeakable gifts, 'that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.' This, then, is the measure of the grace that we may possess. This limitless limit alone bounds the possibilities for every man, the certainties for every Christian.

The effect must be proportioned to the cause. And what effect will be adequate as the outcome of such a cause as 'the riches of His glory'? Nothing short of absolute perfectness, the full transmutation of our dark, cold being into the reflected image of His own burning brightness, the ceaseless replenishing of our own spirits with all graces and gladnesses akin to His, the eternal growth of the soul upward and Godward. Perfection is the sign manual of God in all His works, just as imperfection and the falling below our thought and wish is our 'token in every epistle' and deed of ours. Take the finest needle, and put it below a microscope, and it will be all ragged and irregular, the fine, tapering lines will be broken by many a bulge and bend, and the point blunt and clumsy. Put the blade of grass to the same test, and see how regular its outline, how delicate and true the spear-head of its point. God's work is perfect, man's is clumsy and incomplete. God does not leave off till He has finished. When He rests, it is because, looking on His work, He sees it all 'very good.' His Sabbath is the Sabbath of an achieved purpose, of a fulfilled counsel. The

palaces which we build are ever like that one in the story, where one window remains dark and unjewelled, while the rest blaze in beauty. But when God builds, none can say, 'He was not able to finish.' In His great palace He makes her 'windows of agates' and *all* her 'borders of pleasant stones.'

So we have a right to enlarge our desires and stretch our confidence of what we may possess and become to this, His boundless bound—'The riches of glory.'

But another form in which the standard, or measure, is stated in this letter is: 'The working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead' (i. 19, 20); or, as it is put with a modification, 'grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ' (iv. 7). That is to say, we have not only the whole riches of the divine glory as the measure to which we may lift our hopes, but lest that celestial brightness should seem too high above us, and too far from us, we have Christ in His human-divine manifestation, and especially in the great fact of the Resurrection, set before us, that by Him we may learn what God wills we should become. The former phase of the standard may sound abstract, cloudy, hard to connect with any definite anticipations; and so this form of it is concrete, historical, and gives human features to the fair ideal. His Resurrection is the high-water mark of the divine power, and to the same level it will rise again in regard to every Christian. The Lord, in the glory of His risen life, and in the riches of the gifts which He received when He ascended up on high, is the pattern for us, and the power which fulfils its own pattern. In Him we see what man may become, and what His followers must become. The limits of that power will not be reached until every

Christian soul is perfectly assimilated to that likeness, and bears all its beauty in its face, nor till every Christian soul is raised to participation in Christ's dignity and sits on His throne. Then, and not till then, shall the purpose of God be fulfilled and the gift which is measured by the riches of the Father's glory, and the fulness of the Son's grace, be possessed or conceived in its measureless measure.

But there is a third form in which this same standard is represented. That is the form which is found in our text, and in other places of the epistle: 'According to the power that worketh in us.'

What power is that but the power of the Spirit of God dwelling in us? And thus we have the measure, or standard, set forth in terms respectively applying to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. For the first, the riches of His glory; for the second, His Resurrection and Ascension; for the third, His energy working in Christian souls. The first carries us up into the mysteries of God, where the air is almost too subtle for our gross lungs; the second draws nearer to earth and points us to an historical fact that happened in this everyday world; the third comes still nearer to us, and bids us look within, and see whether what we are conscious of there, if we interpret it by the light of these other measures, will not yield results as great as theirs, and open before us the same fair prospect of perfect holiness and conformity to the divine nature.

There is already a Power at work within us, if we be Christians, of whose workings we may be aware, and from them forecast the measure of the gifts which it can bestow upon us. We may estimate what will be by what we know has been, and by what we

feel is. That is to say, in other words, the effects already produced, and the experiences we have already had, carry in them the pledge of completeness.

I suppose that if the mediæval dream had ever come true, and an alchemist had ever turned a grain of lead into gold, he could have turned all the lead in the world in time, and with crucibles and furnaces enough. The first step is all the difficulty, and if you and I have been changed from enemies into sons, and had one spark of love to God kindled in our hearts, that is a mightier change than any that remains to be effected in order to make us perfect. One grain has been changed, the whole mass will be so in due time.

The present operations of that power carry in them the pledge of their own completion. The strange mingling of good and evil in our present nature, our aspirations so crossed and contradicted, our resolution so broken and falsified, the gleams of light, and the eclipses that follow—all these in their opposition to each other, are plainly transitory, and the workings of that Power within us, though they be often overborne, are as plainly the stronger in their nature, and meant to conquer and to endure. Like some half-hewn block, such as travellers find in long abandoned quarries, whence Egyptian temples, that were destined never to be completed, were built, our spirits are but partly 'polished after the similitude of a palace,' while much remains in the rough. The builders of these temples have mouldered away and their unfinished handiwork will lie as it was when the last chisel touched it centuries ago, till the crack of doom; but stones for God's temple will be wrought to completeness and set in their places. The whole threefold divine cause of

our salvation supplies the measure, and lays the foundation for our hopes, in the glory of the Father, the grace of the Son, the power of the Holy Ghost. Let us lift up our cry: 'Perfect that which concerneth me, forsake not the works of thine own hands,' and we shall have for answer the ancient word, fresh as when it sounded long ago from among the stars to the sleeper at the ladder's foot, 'I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.'

II. Notice the relation of the divine working to our thoughts and desires.

The Apostle in his fervid way strains language to express how far the possibility of the divine working extends. He is able, not only to do all things, but 'beyond all things'—a vehement way of putting the boundless reach of that gracious power. And what he means by this 'beyond all things' is more fully expressed in the next words, in which he labours by accumulating synonyms to convey his sense of the transcendent energy which waits to bless: 'exceeding abundantly above what we ask.' And as, alas! our desires are but shrunken and narrow beside our thoughts, he sweeps a wider orbit when he adds 'above what we *think*.' He has been asking wonderful things, and yet even his farthest-reaching petitions fall far on this side of the greatness of God's power. One might think that even it could go no further than filling us 'with all the fulness of God.' Nor can it; but it may far transcend our conceptions of what that is, and astonish us by its surpassing our thoughts, no less than it shames us by exceeding our prayers.

Of course, all this is true, and is meant to apply, only about the inward gifts of God's grace. I need not remind you that, in the outer world of Providence

and earthly gifts, prayers and wishes often surpass the answers; that there a deeper wisdom often contradicts our thoughts and a truer kindness refuses our petitions, and that so the rapturous words of our text are only true in a very modified and partial sense about God's working *for* us in the world. It is His work *in* us concerning which they are absolutely true.

Of course we know that in all regions of His working He is *able* to surpass our poor human conceptions, and that, properly speaking, the most familiar, and, as we insolently call them, 'smallest' of His works holds in it a mystery—were it none other than the mystery of Being—against which Thought has been breaking its teeth ever since men began to think at all.

But as regards the working of God on our spiritual lives, this passing beyond the bounds of thought and desire is but the necessary result of the fact already dealt with, that the only measure of the power is God Himself, in that Threefold Being. That being so, no plummet of our making can reach to the bottom of the abyss; no strong-winged thought can fly to the outermost bound of the encircling heaven. Widely as we stretch our reverent conceptions, there is ever something beyond. After we have resolved many a dim nebula in the starry sky, and found it all ablaze with suns and worlds, there will still hang, faint and far before us, hazy magnificences which we have not apprehended. Confidently and boldly as we may offer our prayers, and largely as we may expect, the answer is ever more than the petition. For indeed, in every act of His quickening grace, in every God-given increase of our knowledge of God, in every

bestowment of His fulness, there is always more bestowed than we receive, more than we know even while we possess it. Like some gift given in the dark, its true preciousness is not discerned when it is first received. The gleam of the gold does not strike our eye all at once. There is ever an unknown margin felt by us to be over after our capacity of receiving is exhausted. 'And they took up of the fragments that remained, twelve baskets full.'

So, then, let us remember that while our thoughts and prayers can never reach to the full perception, or reception either, of the gift, the exuberant amplitude with which it reaches far beyond both is meant to draw both after it. And let us not forget either that, while the grace which we receive has no limit or measure but the fulness of God, the working limit, which determines what we receive of the grace, is these very thoughts and wishes which it surpasses. We may have as much of God as we can hold, as much as we wish. All Niagara may roar past a man's door, but only as much as he diverts through his own sluice will drive his mill, or quench his thirst. God's grace is like the figures in the Eastern tales, that will creep into a narrow room no bigger than a nutshell, or will tower heaven high. Our spirits are like the magic tent whose walls expanded or contracted at the owner's wish—we may enlarge them to enclose far more of the grace than we have ever possessed. We are not straitened in God, but in ourselves. He is 'able to do exceeding abundantly above what we ask or think.' Therefore let us stretch desires and thoughts to their utmost, remembering that, while they can never reach the measure of His grace in itself, they make the practical measure of our possession of it. 'According

to thy faith' is the real measure of the gift received, even though 'according to the riches of His glory' be the measure of the gift bestowed. Note, again,

III. The glory that springs from the divine work.

'The glory of God' is the lustre of His own perfect character, the bright sum total of all the blended brilliances that compose His name. When that light is welcomed and adored by men, they are said to 'give glory to God,' and this doxology is at once a prophecy that the working of God's power on His redeemed children will issue in setting forth the radiance of His Name yet more, and a prayer that it may. So we have here the great thought expressed in many places of Scripture, that the highest exhibition of the divine character for the reverence and love—of the whole universe, shall we say?—lies in His work on Christian souls, and the effect produced thereby on them. God takes His stand, so to speak, on this great fact in His dealings, and will have His creatures estimate Him by it. He reckons it His highest praise that He has redeemed men, and by His dwelling in them fills them with His own fulness. And this chiefest praise and brightest glory accrues to Him 'in the Church in Christ Jesus.' The weakening of the latter word into 'by Christ Jesus,' as in the English version, is to be regretted, as substituting another thought, Scriptural no doubt and precious, for the precise shade of meaning in the Apostle's mind here. As has been well said, 'the first words denote the outward province; the second, the inward and spiritual sphere in which God was to be praised.' His glory is to shine in the Church, the theatre of His power, the standing demonstration of the might of redeeming love. By this He will be judged, and this He will point to if any ask what is

His divinest work, which bears the clearest imprint of His divinest self. His glory is to be set forth by men on condition that they are 'in Christ,' living and moving in Him, in that mysterious but most real union without which no fruit grows on the dead branches, nor any music of praise breaks from the dead lips.

So, then, think of that wonder that God sets His glory in His dealings with us. Amid all the majesty of His works and all the blaze of His creation, this is what He presents as the highest specimen of His power—the Church of Jesus Christ, the company of poor men, wearied and conscious of many evils, who follow afar off the footsteps of their Lord. How dusty and toil-worn the little group of Christians that landed at Puteoli must have looked as they toiled along the Appian Way and entered Rome! How contemptuously emperor and philosopher and priest and patrician would have curled their lips, if they had been told that in that little knot of Jewish prisoners lay a power before which theirs would cower and finally fade! Even so is it still. Among all the splendours of this great universe, and the mere obtrusive tawdrinesses of earth, men look upon us Christians as poor enough; and yet it is to His redeemed children that God has entrusted His praise, and in their hands that He has lodged the sacred deposit of His own glory.

Think loftily of that office and honour, lowly of yourselves who have it laid upon you as a crown. His honour is in our hands. We are the 'secretaries of His praise.' This is the highest function that any creature can discharge. The Rabbis have a beautiful bit of teaching buried among their rubbish about

angels. They say that there are two kinds of angels—the angels of service and the angels of praise, of which two orders the latter is the higher, and that no angel in it praises God twice, but having once lifted up his voice in the psalm of heaven, then perishes and ceases to be. He has perfected his being, he has reached the height of his greatness, he has done what he was made for, let him fade away. The garb of legend is mean enough, but the thought it embodies is that ever true and solemn one, without which life is nought—‘Man’s chief end is to glorify God.’

And we can only fulfil that high purpose in the measure of our union with Christ. ‘In Him’ abiding, we manifest God’s glory, for in Him abiding we receive God’s grace. So long as we are joined to Him, we partake of His life, and our lives become music and praise. The electric current flows from Him through all souls that are ‘in Him,’ and they glow with fair colours which they owe to their contact with Jesus. Interrupt the communication, and all is darkness. So, brethren, let us seek to abide in Him, severed from whom we are nothing. Then shall we fulfil the purpose of His love, who ‘hath shined in our hearts,’ that we might give to others ‘the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.’ Notice, lastly,

IV. The eternity of the work and of the praise.

As in the former clauses the idea of the transcendent greatness of the power of God was expressed by accumulated synonyms, so here the kindred thought of its eternity, and consequently of the ceaseless duration of the resulting glory, is sought to be set forth by a similar aggregation. The language creaks and labours, as it were, under the weight of the great

conception. Literally rendered, the words are—‘to all generations of the age of the ages’—a remarkable fusing together of two expressions for unbounded duration, which are scarcely congruous. We can understand ‘to all generations’ as expressive of duration as long as birth and death shall last. We can understand ‘the age of the ages’ as pointing to that endless epoch whose moments are ‘ages’; but the blending of the two is but an unconscious acknowledgment that the speech of earth, saturated, as it is, with the colouring of time, breaks down in the attempt to express the thought of eternity. Undoubtedly that solemn conception is the one intended by this strange phrase.

The work is to go on for ever and ever, and with it the praise. As the ages which are the beats of the pendulum of eternity come and go, more and more of God’s power will flow out to us, and more and more of God’s glory will be manifested in us. It must be so; for God’s gift is infinite, and man’s capacity of reception is indefinitely capable of increase. Therefore eternity will be needful in order that redeemed souls may absorb all of God which He can give or they can take. The process has no limits, for there is no bound to be set to the possible approaches of the human spirit to the divine, and none to the exuberant abundance of the beauty and glory which God will give to His child. Therefore we shall live for ever: and for ever show forth His praise and blaze out like the sun with the irradiation of His glory. We cannot die till we have exhausted God. Till we comprehend all His nature in our thoughts, and reflect all His beauty in our character; till we have attained all the bliss that we can think, and received all the good that we can ask;

till Hope has nothing before her to reach towards, and God is left behind: we 'shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord.'

Let His grace work on you, and yield yourselves to Him, that His fulness may fill your emptiness. So on earth we shall be delivered from hopes which mock and wishes that are never fulfilled. So in heaven, after 'ages of ages' of growing glory, we shall have to say, as each new wave of the shoreless, sunlit sea bears us onward, 'It doth not yet appear what we shall be.'

THE CALLING AND THE KINGDOM

'I beseech you, that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.'—

EPH. iv. 1

'They shall walk with Me in white; for they are worthy.'—REV. iil. 4.

THE estimate formed of a centurion by the elders of the Jews was, 'He is worthy for whom Thou shouldst do this,' and in contrast therewith the estimate formed by himself was, 'I am not worthy that Thou shouldst come under my roof.' From these two statements we deduce the thought that merit has no place in the Christian's salvation, but all is to be traced to undeserved, gracious love. But that principle, true and all-important as it is, like every other great truth, may be exaggerated, and may be so isolated as to become untrue and a source of much evil. And so I desire to turn to the other side of the shield, and to emphasise the place that worthiness has in the Christian life, and its personal results both here and hereafter. To say that character has nothing to do with blessedness is untrue, both to conscience and to the Christian revelation; and however we trace all things to grace,

we must also remember that we get what we have fitted ourselves for.

Now, my two texts bring out two aspects which have to be taken in conjunction. The one of them speaks about the present life, and lays it as an imperative obligation on all Christian people to be worthy of their Christianity, and the other carries us into the future and shows us that there it is they who are 'worthy' who attain to the Kingdom. So I think I shall best bring out what I desire to emphasise if I just take these two points—the Christian calling and the life that is worthy of it, and the Christian heaven and the life that is worthy of it.

I. The Christian calling and the life that is worthy of it.

'I beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.' Now, that thought recurs in other places in the Apostle's writings, somewhat modified in expression. For instance, in one passage he speaks of 'walking worthily of the God who has called us to His kingdom and glory,' and in another of the Christian man's duty to 'walk worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing.' There is a certain vocation to which a Christian man is bound to make his life correspond, and his conduct should be in some measure worthy of the ideal that is set before it. Now, we shall best understand what is involved in such worthiness if we make clear to ourselves what the Apostle means by this 'calling' to which he appeals as containing in itself a standard to which our lives are to be conformed.

Suppose we try to put away the technical word 'calling,' and instead of 'calling' say 'summons,' which is nearer the idea, because it conveys the notions more

fully of the urgency of the voice, and of the authority of the voice, which speaks to us. And what is that summons? How do we hear it? One of the other Apostles speaks of God as calling us 'by His own glory and virtue,' that is to say, wherever God reveals Himself in any fashion, and by any medium, to a man, the man fails to understand the deepest meaning of the revelation unless his purged ear hears in it the great voice saying, 'Come up hither.' For all God's self-manifestation, in the creatures around us, in the deep voice of our own souls, in the mysteries of our own personal lives, and in the slow evolution of His purpose through the history of the world, all these revelations of God bear in them the summons to us that hear and see them to draw near to Him, and to mould ourselves into His likeness. And thus, just as the sun by the effluence of its beams gathers all the ministering planets, as it were, round its feet, and draws them to itself, so God, raying Himself out into the waste, fills the waste with magnetic influences which are meant to draw men to nobleness, goodness, God-pleasingness, and God-likeness.

But in another place in this Apostle's writings we read of 'the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.' Yes, there, as focussed into one strong voice, all the summonses are concentrated and gathered. For in Jesus Christ we see the possibilities of humanity realised, and we have the pattern of what we ought to be, and are called thereby to be. And in Christ we get the great motives which make this summons, as it comes mended from His lips, no longer the mere harsh voice of an authoritative legislator, but the gentle invitation, 'Come unto Me, . . . and ye shall find rest unto your souls.' The summons is honeyed, sweetened, and made

infinitely mightier when we hear it from His gracious lips. It is the blessed peculiarity of the Christian ideal, that the manifestation of the ideal carries with it the power to realise it. And just as the increasing strength of the spring sunshine summons the buds from out of their folds, and the snowdrops hear the call and force themselves through the frozen soil, so when Christ summons He inclines the ears that hear, and enables the men that own them to obey the summons, and to be what they are commanded. And thus we have 'the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.'

Now, if that is the call, if the life of Christ is that to which we are summoned, and the death of Christ is that by which we are inclined to obey the summons, and the Spirit of Christ is that by which we are enabled to do so, what sort of a life will be worthy of these? Well, the context supplies part of the answer. 'I beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation . . . with all meekness and lowliness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love.' That is one side of the vocation, and the life that is worthy of it will be a life emancipated from the meanness of selfishness, and delivered from the tumidities of pride and arrogance, and changed into the sweetness of gentleness and the royalties of love.

And then, on the other side, in one of the other texts where the same general set of ideas is involved, we get a yet more wondrous exhibition of the life which the Apostle considered to be worthy. I simply signalise its points of detail without venturing to dwell upon them. 'Unto all pleasing'; the first characteristic of life that is 'worthy of our calling,' and to which, therefore, every one of us Christian people is imperatively bound, is that it shall, in all

its parts, please God, and that is a large demand. Then follow details: 'Fruitful in every good work'—a many-sided fruitfulness, an encyclopædial beneficent activity, covering all the ground of possible excellence; and that is not all; 'increasing in the knowledge of God,'—a life of progressive acquaintance with Him; and that is not all:—'strengthened with all might unto all patience and long-suffering'; nor is that all, for the crown of the whole is 'giving thanks unto the Father.' So, then, 'ye see your calling, brethren.' A life that is 'worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called' is a life that conforms to the divine will, that is 'fruitful in all good,' that is progressive in its acquaintance with God, that is strengthened for all patience and long-suffering, and that in everything is thankful to Him. That is what we are summoned to be, and unless we are in some measure obeying the summons, and bringing out such a life in our conduct, then, notwithstanding all that we have to say about unmerited mercy, and free grace, and undeserved love, and salvation being not by works but by faith, we have no right to claim the mercy to which we say we trust.

Now, this necessity of a worthy life is perfectly harmonious with the great truth that, after all, every man owes all to the undeserved mercy of God. The more nearly we come to realise the purpose of our calling, the more 'worthy' of it we are, the deeper will be our consciousness of our unworthiness. The more we approximate to the ideal, and come closer up to it, and so see its features the better, the more we shall feel how unlike we are to it. The law for Christian progress is that the sense of unworthiness increases in the precise degree in which the worthiness increases. The same man that said, 'Of whom (sinners) I am

chief,' said to the same reader, 'I have kept the faith, henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.' And so the two things are not contradictory but complementary. On the one side 'worthy' has nothing to do with the outflow of Christ's love to us; on the other side we are to 'walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called.'

II. And now, let us turn to the other thought, the Christian heaven and the life that is worthy of it.

Some of you, I have no doubt, would think that that was a tremendous heresy if there were not Scriptural words to buttress it. Let us see what it means. My text out of the Revelation says, 'They shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.' And the same voice that spake these, to some of us, astounding, words, said, when He was here on earth, 'They which shall be counted worthy to attain to the life of the resurrection from the dead,' etc. The text brings out very clearly the continuity and congruity between the life on earth and the life in heaven. Who is it of whom it is said that 'they are worthy' to 'walk in white'? It is the 'few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments.' You see the connection; clean robes here and shining robes hereafter; the two go together, and you cannot separate them. And no belief that salvation, in its incipient germ here, and salvation in its fulness hereafter, are the results 'not of works of righteousness which we have done, but of His mercy,' is to be allowed to interfere with that other truth that they who are worthy attain to the Kingdom.

I must not be diverted from my main purpose, tempting as the theme would be, to say more than just a sentence about what is included in that great promise,

‘They shall walk with Me in white.’ And if I do touch upon it at all, it is only in order to bring out more clearly that the very nature of the heavenly reward demands this worthiness which the text lays down as the condition of possessing it. ‘They shall walk’—activity on an external world. That opens a great door, but perhaps we had better be contented just with looking in. ‘They shall walk’—progress; ‘with me’—union with Jesus Christ; ‘in white’—resplendent purity of character. Now take these four things—activity on an outward universe, progress, union with Christ, resplendent purity of character, and you have almost all that we know of the future; the rest is partly doubtful and is mostly symbolical or negative, and in any case subordinate. Never mind about ‘physical theories of another life’; never mind about all the questions—to some of us how torturing they sometimes are!—concerning that future life. The more we keep ourselves within the broad limits of these promises that are intertwined and folded up together in that one saying, ‘They shall walk with Me in white,’ the better, I think, for the sanity and the spirituality of our conception of a future life.

That being understood, the next thing clearly follows, that only those who in the sense of the word as it is used here, are ‘worthy,’ can enter upon the possession of such a heaven. From the nature of the gift it is clear that there must be a moral and religious congruity between the gift and the recipient, or, to put it into plainer words, you cannot get heaven unless your nature is capable of receiving these great gifts which constitute heaven. People talk about the future state as being ‘a state of retribution.’ Well! that is not altogether a satisfactory form of expression,

for retribution may convey the idea, such as is presented in earthly rewards and punishments, of there being no natural correspondence between the crime and its punishment, or the virtue and its reward. A bit of bronze shaped into the form of a cross may be the retribution 'For Valour,' and a prison cell may be the retribution by legal appointment for a certain crime. But that is not the way that God deals out rewards and punishments in the life which is to come. It is not a case of retribution, meaning thereby the arbitrary bestowment of a certain fixed gift in response to certain virtues, but it is a case of *outcome*, and the old metaphor of sowing and reaping is the true one. We sow here and we reap yonder. We pass into that future, 'bringing our sheaves with us,' and we have to grind the corn and make bread of it, and we have to eat the work of our own hands. They drink as they have brewed. 'Their works do follow them,' or they go before them and 'receive them into everlasting habitations.' Outcome, the necessary result, and not a mere arbitrary retribution, is the relation which heaven bears to earth.

That is plain, too, from our own nature. We carry ourselves with us wherever we go. The persistence of character, the continuity of personal being, the continuity of memory, the *unobliterable*—if I may coin a word—results upon ourselves of our actions, all these things make it certain that what looks to us a cleft, deep and broad, between the present life and the next, is to those that have passed it, and see it from the other side, but a little crack in the soil scarcely observable, and that we carry on into another world the selves that we have made here. Whatever death does—and it does a great deal that we do not know of—it

does not alter, it only brings out, and, as I suppose, intensifies, the main drift and set of a character. And so they who 'have not defiled their garments shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.'

Ah, brethren! how solemn that makes life; the fleeting moment carries Eternity in its bosom. It passes, and the works pass, but nothing human ever dies, and we bear with us the net results of all the yesterdays into that eternal to-day. You write upon a thin film of paper and there is a black leaf below it. Yes, and below the black leaf there is another sheet, and all that you write on the top one goes through the dark interposed page, and is recorded on the third, and one day that will be taken out of the book, and you will have to read it and say, 'What I have written I have written.'

So, dear friends, whilst we begin with that unmerited love, and that same unmerited love is the sole ground on which the gates of the kingdom of heaven are by the Death and Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ opened to believers, their place there depends not only on faith but on the work which is the fruit of faith. There is such a thing as being 'saved yet so as by fire,' and there is such a thing as 'having an entrance ministered abundantly unto us'; we have to make the choice. There is such a thing as the sore punishment of which they are thought worthy who have rejected the Son of God, and counted the blood of the Covenant an unholy thing; and there is such a thing as a man saying, 'I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come unto me,' and Christ answering, 'He shall walk with Me in white, for he is worthy,' and we have to make that choice also.

‘THE THREEFOLD UNITY’

‘One Lord, one faith, one baptism.’—EPH. iv. 5.

THE thought of the unity of the Church is very prominent in this epistle. It is difficult for us, amidst our present divisions, to realise how strange and wonderful it then was that a bond should have been found which drew together men of all nations, ranks, and characters. Pharisee and philosopher, high-born women and slaves, Roman patricians and gladiators, Asiatic Greeks and Syrian Jews forgot their feuds and sat together as one in Christ. It is no wonder that Paul in this letter dwells so long and earnestly on that strange fact. He is exhorting here to a unity of spirit corresponding to it, and he names a seven-fold oneness—one body and one spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. The outward institution of the Church, as a manifest visible fact, comes first in the catalogue. One Father is last, and between these there lie the mention of the one Spirit and the one Lord. The ‘body’ is the Church. ‘Spirit, Lord, God,’ are the triune divine personality. Hope and faith are human acts by which men are joined to God; Baptism is the visible symbol of their incorporation into the one body. These three clauses of our text may be considered as substantially including all the members of the series. We deal with them quite simply now, and consider them in the order in which they stand here.

I. The one Lord.

The deep foundation of Christian unity is laid in the divine Christ. Here, as generally in the New Testament, the name ‘Lord’ designates Christ in His authority as ruler of men and in His divinity as Incar-

nation of God. It would not be going too far to suggest that we have in the name, standing as it does, for the most part, in majestic simplicity, a reference to the Old Testament name of Jehovah, which in the Greek translation familiar to Paul is generally rendered by this same word. Nor can we ignore the fact that in this great catalogue of the Christian unities the Lord stands in the centre of the three personalities named, and is regarded as being at once the source of the Spirit and the manifestation of the Father. The place which this name occupies in relation to the Faith which is next named suggests that the living personal Christ is the true uniting principle amongst men. The one body realises its oneness in its common relation to the one Lord. It is one, not because of identity in doctrine, not because of any of the bonds which hold men together in human associations, precious and sacred as many of these are, but 'we being many are one bread, for we are all partakers of that one bread.' The magnet draws all the particles to itself and holds them in a mysterious unity.

II. One faith.

The former clause set forth in one great name all the objective elements of the Church's oneness; this clause sets forth, with equally all-comprehending simplicity, the subjective element which makes a Christian. The one Lord, in the fulness of His nature and the perfectness of His work, is the all-inclusive object of faith. He, in His own living person, and not any dogmas about Him, is regarded as the strong support round which the tendrils of faith cling and twine and grow. True, He is made known to us as possessing certain attributes and as doing certain things which, when stated in words, become doctrines, and a Christ without

these will never be the object of faith. The antithesis which is so often drawn between Christ's person and Christian doctrines is by no means sound, though the warning not to substitute the latter for the former is only too necessary at all times.

The subjective act which lays hold of Christ is faith, which in our text has its usual meaning of saving trust, and is entirely misconceived if it is taken, as it sometimes is, to mean the whole body of beliefs which make up the Christian creed. That which unites us to Jesus Christ is an infinitely deeper thing than the acceptance of any creed. A man may believe thirty-nine or thirty-nine hundred articles without having any real or vital connection with the one Lord. The faith which saves is the outgoing of the whole self towards Christ. In it the understanding, the emotions, and the will are all in action. The New Testament *faith* is absolutely identical with the Old Testament *trust*, and the prophet who exhorted Israel, 'Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength,' was preaching the very same message as the Apostle who cried, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.'

That 'saving faith' is the same in all Christians, however different they may be in condition and character and general outlook and opinion upon many points of Christian knowledge. The things on which they differ are on the surface, and sometimes by reason of their divergencies Christians stand like frowning cliffs that look threateningly at one another across a narrow gorge, but deep below ground they are continuous and the rock is unbroken. In many and melancholy ways 'the unity of faith and knowledge' is contradicted in the existing organisations of the Church, and we are

tempted to postpone its coming to the day of the new Jerusalem which is compact together; but the clarion note of this great text may encourage us to hope, and to labour in our measure for the fulfilment of the hope, that all, who by one faith have been joined to the one Lord, may yet know themselves to be one in Him, and present to the world the fair picture of one body animated by one spirit.

III. One baptism.

Obviously in Paul's mind baptism here means, not the baptism with the Spirit, but the rite, one and the same for all, by which believers in Christ enter into the fellowship of the Church. It was then a perpetual rite administered as a matter of course to all who professed to have been joined to the one Lord by their one faith. The sequence in the three clauses of our text is perfectly clear. Baptism is the expression and consequence of the faith which precedes it. Surely there is here a most distinct implication that it is a declaration of personal faith. Without enlarging on the subject, I venture to think that the order of the Apostle's thought negatives other conceptions of Christian baptism, such as, that it is a communication of Grace, or an expression of the feelings and desires of parents, or a declaration of some truth about redeemed humanity. Paul's order is Christ's when He said, 'He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.'

It is very remarkable and instructive that whilst thus our text shows that baptism was a matter of course and universally practised, the references to it in the epistles are so few. The inference is not that it was neglected, but that, as being a rite, it could not be as important as were Christian truths and Christian character. May we, in a word, suggest the contrast

between the frequency and tone of the Apostolic references to baptism and those which we find in many quarters to-day?

It is remarkable that here the Lord's Supper is not mentioned, and all the more so, that in Paul's letter to the Corinthians, the passage which we have already quoted does put emphasis upon it as a token of Christian unity. The explanation of the omission may be found in the fact that, in these early days, the Lord's Supper was not a separate rite, but was combined with ordinary meals, or perhaps more probably in the consideration that baptism was what the Lord's Supper was not—an initial rite which incorporated the possessors of one faith into the one body.

'THE MEASURE OF GRACE'

'But unto each one of us was the grace given according to the measure of the gift of Christ.'—EPh. iv. 7 (R.V.).

THE Apostle here makes a swift transition from the thought of the unity of the Church to the variety of gifts to the individual. 'Each' is contrasted with 'all.' The Father who stands in so blessed and gracious a relationship to the united whole also sustains an equally gracious and blessed relationship to each individual in that whole. It is because each receives His individual gift that God works in all. The Christian community is the perfection of individualism and of collectivism, and this rich variety of the gifts of grace is here urged as a reason additional to the unity of the one body, for the exhortation to the endeavour to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

I. Each Christian soul receives grace through Christ.

The more accurate rendering of the Revised Version reads '*the* grace,' and the definite article points to it as a definite and familiar fact in the Ephesian believers to which the Apostle could point with the certainty that their own consciousness would confirm his statement. The wording of the Greek further implies that the grace was given at a definite point in the past, which is most naturally taken to have been the moment in which each believer laid hold on Jesus by faith. It is further to be noted that the content of the gift is the grace itself and not the graces which are its product and manifestation in the Christian life. And this distinction, which is in accordance with Paul's habitual teaching, leads us to the conclusion, that the essential character of the grace given through the act of our individual faith is that of a new vital force, flowing into and transforming the individual life. From that unspeakable gift which Paul supposed to be verifiable by the individual experience of every Christian, there would follow the graces of Christian character in which would be included the deepening and purifying of all the natural capacities of the individual self, and the casting out from thence of all that was contrary to the transforming power of the new life.

Such an utterance as this, so quietly and confidently taking for granted that the experience of every believer verifies it in his own case, may well drive us all to look more earnestly into our own hearts, to see whether in them are any traces of a similar experience. If it be true, that to every one of us is given *the* grace, how comes it that so many of us dare not profess to have any vivid remembrance of possessing it, of having possessed it, or of any clear consciousness of possessing it now? There may be gifts bestowed upon unconscious

receivers, but surely this is not one of these. If we do not know that we have it, it must at least remain very questionable whether we do have it at all, and very certain that we have it in scant and shrivelled fashion.

The universality of the gift was a startling thing in a world which, as far as cultivated heathenism was concerned, might rightly be called aristocratic, and by the side of a religion of privilege into which Judaism had degenerated. The supercilious sarcasm in the lips of Pharisees, 'This people which knoweth not the law are cursed,' but too truly expresses the gulf between the Rabbis and the 'folk of the earth,' as the masses were commonly and contemptuously designated by the former. Into the midst of a society in which such distinctions prevailed, the proclamation that the greatest gift was bestowed upon all must have come with revolutionary force, and been hailed as emancipation. Peter had penetrated to grasp the full meaning and wondrous novelty of that universality, when on Pentecost he pointed to 'that which had been spoken by the prophet Joel' as fulfilled on that day, 'I will pour forth of my Spirit upon all flesh . . . Yea, and on my servants and handmaidens . . . will I pour forth of my Spirit.' The rushing, mighty wind of that day soon dropped. The fiery tongues ceased to quiver on the disciples' heads, and the many voices that spoke were silenced, but the gift was permanent, and is poured out now as it was then, and now, as then, it is true that the whole company of believers receive the Spirit, though alas! by their own faults it is not true that 'they are all *filled* with the Holy Spirit.'

Christ is the giver. He has 'power over the Spirit of Holiness,' and as the Evangelist has said in his comment on our Lord's great words, when 'He stood and

cried,' 'If any man thirst let him come unto Me and drink,' 'This spake He of the Spirit which they that believed on Him were to receive.' We cannot pierce into the depth of the mutual relations of the three divine Persons mentioned in the context, but we can discern that Christ is for us the self-revealing activity of the divine nature, the right arm of the Father, or, to use another metaphor, the channel through which the else 'closed sea' of God flows into the world of creatures. Through that channel is poured into believing hearts the river of the water of life, which proceeds out of the one 'throne of God and of the Lamb.' This gift of the Spirit of Holiness to all believers is the deepest and truest conception of Christ's gifts to His Church. His past work of sacrifice for the sins of the world was finished, as with a parting cry He proclaimed on Calvary, and the power of that sacrifice will never be exhausted, but the taking away of the sins of the world is but the initial stage of the work of Christ, and its further stages are carried on through all the ages. He 'worketh hitherto,' and His present work, in so far as believers are concerned, is not only the forthputting of divine energy in regard to outward circumstances, but the imparting to them of the Divine Spirit to be the very life of their lives and the Lord of their spirits. Christian people are but too apt to give undue prominence to what Christ did for them when He died, and to lose sight, in the overwhelming lustre of His unspeakable sacrifice, of what He is doing for them whilst He lives. It would tend to restore the proportions of Christian truth and to touch our hearts into a deeper and more continuous love to Him, if we more habitually thought of Him, not only as the Christ who died, but also as the Christ who rather is risen again, who

is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.

II. The gift of this grace is in itself unlimited.

Our text speaks of it as being according to the measure of the gift of Christ, and that phrase may either mean the gift which Christ receives or that which He gives. Probably the latter is the Apostle's meaning here, as seems to be indicated by the following words that 'when He ascended on high, He gave gifts unto men,' but what He gives is what He possesses, and the Apostle goes on to point out that the ultimate issue of His giving to the Church is that it attains to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

It may cast some light on this point if we note the remarkable variety of expressions in this epistle for the norm or standard or limit of the gift. In one place the Apostle speaks of the gift bestowed upon believers as being according to the riches of the Father's glory; then it has no limit short of a participation in the divine fulness. God's glory is the transcendent lustre of His own infinite character in its self-manifestation. The Apostle labours to flash through the dim medium of words the glory of that light by blending incongruously, but effectively, the other metaphor of riches, and the two together suggest a wonderful, though vague thought of the infinite wealth and the exhaustless brightness which we call Abba, Father. The humblest child may lift longing and confident eyes and believe that he has received in very deed, through his faith in Jesus Christ, a gift which will increase in riches and in light until it makes him perfect as his Father in heaven was perfect. It was an old faith, based upon insight far inferior to ours, which proclaimed with triumph over the frowns of death. 'I shall

be satisfied when I awake with Thy likeness.' Would that those who have so much more for faith to build on, built as nobly as did these!

The gift has in itself no limit short of participation in the likeness of Christ. In another place in this letter the measure of that might which is the guarantee of Christian hope is set forth with an abundance of expression which might almost sound as an unmeaning accumulation of synonyms, as being 'according to the working of the strength of His might which He wrought in Christ'; and what is the range of the working of that might is disclosed to our faith in the Resurrection of Jesus, and the setting of Him high above all rule and authority and power and lordship and every creature in the present or in any future. Paul's continual teaching is that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ was wrought in Him, not as a mere human individual but as our head and representative. Through Him we rise, not only from an ethical death of sin and separation from God, but we shall rise from physical death, and in Him the humblest believer possessing a vital union with the Lord of life has a share in His dominion, and, as His own faithful word has promised, sits with Him on His throne, even as He is set down with the Father on His throne.

That gift has in itself no limit short of its own energy. In another part of this epistle the Apostle indicates the measure up to which our being filled is to take effect, as being 'all the fulness of God,' and in such an overwhelming vision breaks forth into fervent praise of Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, and then supplies us with a measure which may widen and heighten our petitions and expectations when He tells us that we are to find the

measure of God's working for us, not in the impoverishment of our present possessions, but in the exceeding riches of the power that worketh in us—that is to say, that we are to look for the limit of the limitless gift in nothing short of the boundless energy of God Himself. In the Epistle to the Colossians Paul uses the same illustration with an individual reference to his own labours. In our text he associates with himself all believers, as being conscious of a power working in them, which is really the limitless power of God, and heartens them to anticipate that whatever limitless power can effect in them will certainly be theirs. God does not leave off till He has done and till He can look upon His completed work and pronounce it very good.

III. This boundless grace is in each individual case bounded for the time by our own faith.

When I lived near the New Forest I used to hear much of what they called 'rolling fences.' A man received or took a little piece of Crown land on which he built a house and put round it a fence which could be judiciously and silently pushed outwards by slow degrees and enclosed, year by year, a wider area. We Christian people have, as it were, our own small, cultivated plot on the boundless prairie, the extent of which we measure for ourselves and which we can enlarge as we will. We have been speaking of the various aspects under which the boundlessness of the gift is presented by the Apostle, but there is another 'according to' in Christ's own words, 'According to your faith be it unto you,' and that statement lays down the practical limits of our present possession of the boundless gift. We have as much as we desire; we have as much as we take; we have as much as we use; we have as much as we can hold. We are admitted into the treasure house,

and all around us lie ingots of gold and vessels full of coins; we ourselves determine how much of the treasure should be ours, and if at any time we feel like empty-handed paupers rather than like possible millionaires, the reason lies in our own slowness to take that which is freely given to us of God. His word to us all is, 'Ye are not straitened in Me, ye are straitened in yourselves.' It is well for us to keep ever before us the boundlessness of the gift in itself and the working limit in ourselves which conditions our actual possession of the riches. For so, on the one hand, should we be encouraged to expect great things from God, and, on the other hand, be humbled by the contrast between what we might be and what we are. The river that rushes full of water from the throne can send but a narrow and shallow trickle through the narrow channel choked with much rubbish, which we provide for it. It is of little avail that the sun in the heavens pours down its flood of light and warmth if the windows of our hearts are by our own faults so darkened that but a stray beam, shorn of its brightness and warmth, can find its way into our darkness. The first lesson which we have to draw from the contrast between the boundlessness of the gift and the narrow limits of our individual possession and experience of it, is the lesson of penitent recognition and confession of the unbelief which lurks in our strongest faith. 'Lord I believe, help Thou mine unbelief,' should be the prayer of every Christian soul.

Not less surely will the recognition that the form and amount of the grace of God, which is possessed by each, is determined by the faith of each, lead to tolerance of the diversity of gifts. We have received our own proper gift of God, that which the strength and purity

of our faith is capable of possessing, and it is not for us to carp at our brethren, either at those in advance of us or at those behind us. We have to remember that as it takes all sorts of people to make up a world, so it takes all varieties of Christian character to make a church. It is the body and not the individual members which represents Christ to the world. The firmest adherence to our own form of the universal gift will combine with the widest toleration of the gifts of others. The white light appears when red, green, and blue blend together, not when each tries to be the other. 'Every man hath his own proper gift of God, one after this fashion and another after that,' and we shall be true to the boundlessness of the gift and to the limitations of our own possession of it, in the measure of which we combine obedience to the light which shines in us, with thankful recognition of that which is granted to others.

The contrast between these two must be kept vivid if we would live in the freedom of the hope of the glory of God, for in the contrast lies the assurance of endless growth. A process is begun in every Christian soul of which the only natural end is the full possession of God in Christ, and that full possession can never be reached by a finite creature, but that does not mean that the ideal mocks us and retreats before us like the pot of gold, which the children fancy is at the end of the rainbow. Rather it means a continuous succession of our realisations of the ideal in ever fuller and more blessed reality. In this life we may, on condition of our growth in faith, grow in the possession of the fullness of God, and yet at each moment that possession will be greater, though at all moments we may be filled. In the Christian life to-morrow may be safely reckoned

as destined to be 'as yesterday and much more abundant,' and when we pass from the imperfections of the most perfect earthly life, there will still remain ever before us the glory, which, according to the measure of our capacity, is also in us, and we shall draw nearer and nearer to it, and be for ever receiving into our expanding spirits more and more of the infinite fullness of God.

THE GOAL OF PROGRESS

'Till we all attain unto the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a full grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.'—EPH. iv. 13 (R.V.).

THE thought of the unity of the Church is much in the Apostle's mind in this epistle. It is set forth in many places by his two favourite metaphors of the body and the temple, by the relation of husband and wife and by the family. It is contemplated in its great historical realisation by the union of Jew and Gentile in one whole. In the preceding context it is set forth as already existing, but also as lying far-off in the future. The chapter begins with an earnest exhortation to preserve this unity and with an exhibition of the oneness which does really exist in body, spirit, hope, lord, faith, baptism. But the Apostle swiftly passes to the corresponding thought of diversity. There are varieties in the gifts of the one Spirit; whilst each individual in the one whole receives his due portion, there are broad differences in spiritual gifts. These differences do not break the oneness, but they may tend to do so; they are not causes of separation and do not necessarily interfere with unity, but they may be made so. Their existence leaves room for brotherly

helpfulness, and creates a necessity for it. The wiser are to teach; the more advanced are to lead; the more largely gifted are to encourage and stimulate the less richly endowed. Such outward helps and brotherly impartations of gifts is, on the one hand, a result of the one gift to the whole body, and is on the other a sign of, because a necessity arising from, the imperfect degree in which each individual has received of Christ's fulness; and these helps of teaching and guidance have for their sole object to make Christian men able to do without them, and are, as the text tells us, to cease when, and to last till, we all attain to the fulness of Christ. To Paul, then, the manifest unity of the Church was to be the end of its earthly course, but it also was real, though incomplete, in the present, and the emphasis of our text is not so much laid on telling us when this oneness was to be manifested as in showing us in what it consists. We have here a threefold expression of the true unity, as consisting in a oneness of relation to Christ, a consequent maturity of manhood and a perfect possession of all which is in Christ.

I. The true unity is oneness of relation to Christ.

The Revised Version is here to be preferred, and its 'attain unto' brings out the idea which the Authorised Version fails to express, that the text is intended to point to the period at which Christ's provision of helpful gifts to the growing Church is to cease, when the individuals composing it have come to their destined unity and maturity in Him. The three clauses of our text are each introduced by the same preposition, and there is no reason why in the second and third it should be rendered 'unto' and in the first should be watered down to 'in.'

There are then two regions in which this unity is to be realised. These are expressed by the great words, 'the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God.' These words are open to a misunderstanding, as if they referred to a unity as between faith and knowledge; but it is obvious to the slightest reflection that what is meant is the unity of all believers in regard to their faith, and in regard to their knowledge. It is to be noted that the Apostle has just said that there is one faith, now he points to the realisation of that oneness as the very end and goal of all discipline and growth. I suppose that we have to think here of the manifold and sad differences existing in Christian men, in regard to the depth and constancy and formative power of their faith. There are some who have it so strong and vigorous that it is a vision rather than a faith, a trust, deep and firm and settled, to which the present is but the fleeting shadow, and the unseen the eternal and only reality; but, alas! there are others in whom the light of faith burns feebly and flickers. Nor are these differences the attributes of different men, but the same man varies in the power of his faith, and we all of us know what it is to have it sometimes dominant over our whole selves, and sometimes weak and crushed under the weight of earthly passions. To-day we may be all flame, to-morrow all ice. Our faith may seem to us to be strong enough to move mountains, and before an hour is past we may find it, by experience, to be less than a grain of mustard seed. 'Action and reaction are always equal and contrary,' and that law is as true in reference to our present spiritual life as it is true in regard to physical objects. We have, then, the encouragement of such a word as that of our text for looking forward

to and straining towards the reversal of these sad alterations in a fixed and continuous faith which should grasp the whole Christ and should always hold Him. There may still be diversities and degrees, but each should have his measure always full. 'Thy Sun shall no more go down'; there will no longer be the contrast between the flashing waters of a flood-tide and the dreary mud-banks disclosed at low water. We shall stand at different points, but the faces of all will be turned to Him who is the Light of all, and every face will shine with the likeness of His, when we see Him as He is.

But our text points us to another form of unity—the oneness of the knowledge of the Son of God.

The Apostle uses an emphatic term which is very familiar on his lips to designate this knowledge. It means not a mere intellectual apprehension, but a profound and vital acquaintance, dependent indeed upon faith, and realised in experience. It is the knowledge for which Paul was ready to 'count all things but loss' that he might know Jesus, and winning which he would count himself to 'have apprehended.' The unity in this deep and blessed knowledge has nothing to do with identity of opinion on the points which have separated Christians. It is not to be sought by outward unanimity, nor by aggregation in external communities. The Apostle's great thought is made small and the truth of it is falsified when it is over-hastily embodied in institutions. It has been sought in a uniformity which resembles unity as much as a bundle of faggots, all cut to the same length, and tied together with a rope, resemble the tree from which they were chopped, waving in the wind and living one life to the tips of its furthest branches. Men have made out of

the Apostle's divine vision of a unity in the faith and knowledge of the Son of God 'a staunch and solid piece of framework as any January could freeze together,' and few things have stood more in the way of the realisation of his glowing anticipations than the formation of the great Corporation, imposing from its bulk and antiquity, to part from which was branded as breaking the unity of the spirit.

Paul gives no clear definition here of the time when the one body of Christian believers should have attained to the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God, and the question may not have presented itself to him. It may appear that in view of the immediate context he regards the goal as one to be reached in our present life, or it may be that he is thinking rather of the Future, when the Master 'should bring together every joint and member and mould them into an immortal feature of loveliness and perfection.' But the time at which this great ideal should be attained is altogether apart from the obligation pressing upon us all, at all times, to work towards it. Whensoever it is reached it will only be by our drawing 'nearer, day by day, each to his brethren, all to God,' or rather, each to God and so all to his brethren. Take twenty points in a great circle and let each be advanced by one half of its distance to the centre, how much nearer will each be to each? Christ is our unity, not dogmas, not politics, not rituals: our oneness is a oneness of life. We need for our centre no tower with a top reaching to heaven, we have a living Lord who is with us, and in Him, we being many, are one.

II. Oneness in faith and knowledge knits all into a 'perfect man.'

'Perfect,' the Apostle here uses in opposition to the

immediately following expression in the next verse, of 'children.' It therefore means not so much moral perfection as maturity or fulness of growth. So long as we fall short of the state of unity we are in the stage of immaturity. When we come to be one in faith and knowledge we have reached full-grown manhood. The existence of differences belongs to the infancy and boyhood of the Church, and as we grow one we are putting away childish things. What a contrast there is between Paul's vision here and the tendency which has been too common among Christians to magnify their differences, and to regard their obstinate adherence to these as being 'steadfastness in the faith'! How different would be the relations between the various communities into which the one body has been severed, if they all fully believed that their respective shibboleths were signs that they had not yet attained, neither were already perfect! When we began to be ashamed of these instead of glorying in them we should be beginning to grow into the maturity of our Christian life.

But the Apostle speaks of 'a perfect man' in the singular and not of 'men' in the plural, as he has already described the result of the union of Jew and Gentile as being the making 'of twain one new man.' This remarkable expression sets forth, in the strongest terms, the vital unity which connects all members of the one body so closely that there is but one life in them all. There are many members, but one body. Their functions differ, but the life in them all is identical. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of thee,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' Each is necessary to the completeness of the whole, and all are necessary to make

up the one body of Christ. It is His life which manifests itself in every member and which gives clearness of vision to the eye, strength and deftness to the hand. He needs us all for His work on the world and for His revelation to the world of the fulness of His life. In some parts of England there are bell-ringers who stand at a table on which are set bells, each tuned to one note, and they can perform most elaborate pieces of music by swiftly catching up and sounding each of these in the right place. All Christian souls are needed for the Master's hand to bring out the note of each in its place. In the lowest forms of life all vital functions are performed by one simple sac, and the higher the creature is in the scale the more are its organs differentiated. In the highest form of all, 'as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.'

III. This perfect manhood is the possession of all who are in Christ.

The fulness of Christ is the fulness which belongs to Him, or that of which He is full. All which He is and has is to be poured into His servants, and when all this is communicated to them the goal will be reached. We shall be full-grown men, and more wonderful still, we all shall make one perfect man, and individual completenesses will blend into that which is more complete than any of these, the one body, which corresponds to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

This is the goal of humanity in which, and in which alone, the dreams of thinkers about perfectibility will become facts, and the longings that are deeply rooted in every soul will find their fulfilment.

By our personal union with Jesus Christ through faith, our individual perfection, both in the sense of maturity and in that of the realisation of ideal manhood, is assured, and in Him the race, as well as the individual, is redeemed, and will one day be glorified. The Utopias of many thinkers are but partial and distorted copies of the kingdom of Christ. The reality which He brings and imparts is greater than all these, and when the New Jerusalem comes down out of heaven, and is planted on the common earth, it will outvie in lustre and outlast in permanence all forms of human association. The city of wisdom which was Athens, the city of power which was Rome, the city of commerce which is London, the city of pleasure which is Paris, 'pale their ineffectual fires' before the city in the light whereof the nations should walk.

The beginning of the process, of which the end is this inconceivable participation in the glory of Jesus, is simple trust in Him. 'He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit,' and he who trusts in Him, loves Him, and obeys Him, is joined to Him, and thereby is started on a course which never halts nor stays so long as the faith which started him abides, till he 'grows up into Him in all things which is the head, even Christ.' The experience of the Christian life as God means it to be, and by the communication of His grace makes it possible for it to become, is like that of men embarked on some sun-lit ocean, sailing past shining headlands, and ever onwards, over the boundless blue, beneath a calm sky and happy stars. The blissful voyagers are in full possession at every moment of all which they need and of all of His fulness which they can contain, but the full possession at every moment increases as they, by it, become

capable of fuller possession. Increasing capacity brings with it increasing participation in the boundless fullness of Him who filleth all in all.

CHRIST OUR LESSON AND OUR TEACHER

'But ye have not so learned Christ; if so be that ye have heard Him, and have been taught in Him.'—EPH. iv. 20, 21.

THE Apostle has been describing in very severe terms the godlessness and corruption of heathenism. He reckons on the assent of the Ephesian Christians when he paints the society in which they lived as alienated from God, insensible to the restraints of conscience, and foul with all uncleanness. That was a picture of heathenism drawn from the life and submitted to the judgment of those who knew the original only too well. It has been reserved for modern eulogists to regard such statements as exaggerations. Those who knew heathenism from the inside knew that they were sober truth. The colonnades of the stately temple of Ephesus stank with proofs of their correctness.

Out of that mass of moral putridity these Ephesian Christians had been dragged. But its effects still lingered in them, and it was all about them with its pestilential miasma. So the first thing that they needed was to be guarded against it. The Apostle, in the subsequent context, with great earnestness gives a series of moral injunctions of the most elementary kind. Their very simplicity is eloquent. What sort of people must they have formerly been who needed to be bade not to steal and not to lie?

But before he comes to the specific duties, he lays down the broad general principle of which all these are to be but manifestations—viz. that they and we

need, as the foundation of all noble conduct and of all theoretical ethics, the suppression and crucifixion of the old self and the investiture with a new self. And this double necessity, says the Apostle in my text, is the plain teaching of Jesus Christ to all His disciples.

Now the words which I have selected as my text are but a fragment of a closely concatenated whole, but I may deal with them separately at this time. They are very remarkable. They lay, as it seems to me, the basis for all Christian conduct; and they teach us how there is no real knowledge of Jesus Christ which does not effloresce into the practice of these virtues and graces which the Apostle goes on to describe.

I. First, Christ our Lesson and Christ our Teacher.

Mark the singular expression with which this text begins. 'Ye have not so learned *Christ*.' Now, we generally talk about learning a subject, a language, a science, or an art; but we do not talk about learning people. But Paul says we are Christ's disciples, not only in the sense that we learn of Him as Teacher—which follows in the next clause—but that we learn Him as the theme of our study.

That is to say, the relation of the person of Jesus Christ to all that He has to teach and reveal to the world is altogether different from that of all other teachers of all sorts of truth, to the truth which they proclaim. You can accept the truths and dismiss into oblivion the men from whom you got them. But you cannot reject Christ and take Christianity. The two are inseparably united. For, in regard to all spiritual and to all moral truth—truth about conduct and character—Jesus Christ is what He teaches. So we may say, turning well-known words of a poet in another direction: 'My lesson is in Thee.'

But that is not all. My text goes on to speak about another thing: 'Ye have learned Christ if so be that ye have *heard Him* and been taught.' Now that 'If so be' is not the 'if' of uncertainty or doubt, but it is equivalent to 'if, as I know to be the case,' or '*since* ye have heard Him.' Away there in Ephesus, years and years after the crucifixion, these people who had never seen Christ in the flesh, nor heard a word from the lips 'into which grace was poured,' are yet addressed by the Apostle as those who had listened to Him and heard Him speak. They had 'heard Him and been taught.' So He was Lesson and He was Teacher. And that is as true about us as it was about them. Let me say only a word or two about each of these two thoughts.

I have already suggested that the underlying truth which warrants the first of them is that Jesus Christ's relation to His message and revelation is altogether different from that of other teachers to what they have to communicate to the world. Of course we all know that, in regard to the wider sphere of religious and Christian truth, it is not only what Christ said, but even more what He did and was, that makes His revelation of the Father's heart. Precious as are the words which drop from His lips, which are spirit and are life, His life itself is more than all His teachings; and it is when we learn, not *from* Him, but when we learn *Him*, that we see the Father. But my text has solely reference to conduct, and in that aspect it just implies this thought, that the sum of all duty, the height of all moral perfectness, the realised ideal of humanity, is in Christ, and that the true way to know what a man or a nation ought to do is to study Him.

How strange it is, when one comes to consider it,

that the impression of absolute perfection, free from all limitations of race or country or epoch or individual character—and yet not a vague abstraction but a true living Person—has been printed upon the minds and hearts of the world by these four little pamphlets which we call gospels! I do not think that there is anything in the whole history of literature to compare with the impression of veracity and historical reality and individual personality which is made by these fragmentary narratives. And although it has nothing to do with my present subject, I may just say in a sentence that it seems to me that the character of Jesus Christ as painted in the Gospels, in its incomparable vividness and vitality, is one of the strongest evidences for the simple faithfulness as biographies, of these books. Nothing else but the Man seen could have resulted in such compositions.

But apart altogether from that, how blessed it is that we have not to enter upon any lengthened investigations, far beyond the power of average minds, in order to get hold of the fundamental laws of moral conduct! How blessed it is that all the harshness of 'Obey this law or die' is by His life changed into 'Look at Me, and, for My love's sake, study Me and be like Me!' This is the blessed peculiarity which gives all its power and distinctive characteristic to the morality of the Gospel, that law is changed from a statuesque white ideal, pure as marble and cold and lifeless as it, into a living Person with a throbbing heart of love, and an outstretched hand of help, whose word is, 'If ye love Me, keep My commandments, and be like Me.'

Christian men and women! study Jesus Christ. That is the Alpha and Omega of all right knowledge of duty

and of all right practice of it. Learn Him, His self-suppression, His self-command, His untroubled calmness, His immovable patience, His continual gentleness, His constant reference of all things to the Father's will. Study these. To imitate Him is blessedness; to resemble Him is perfection. 'Ye have learned Christ' if you are Christians at all. You have at least begun the alphabet, but oh! in Him 'are hid all the treasures,' not only 'of wisdom and knowledge,' but of 'whatsoever things are lovely and of good report'; and 'if there is any virtue, and if there is any praise,' we shall find them in Him who is our Lesson, our perfect Lesson.

But that is not all. Lessons are very well, but—dear me!—the world wants something besides lessons. It has had plenty of teaching. The trouble is not that we are not instructed, but that we do not take the lessons that are laid before us. And so my text suggests another thing besides the wholly inadequate conception, as it would be if it stood alone, of a mere exhibition of what we ought to be.

'If so be that ye have *heard* Him.' As I said, these Ephesian Christians, far away in Asia Minor, with seas and years between them and the plains of Galilee and the Cross of Calvary, are yet regarded by the Apostle as having listened to Jesus Christ. We, far away down the ages, and in another corner of the world, as really, without metaphor, in plain fact, may have Jesus Christ speaking to us, and may hear His voice. These Ephesians had heard Him, not only because they had heard about Him, nor because they had heard Him speaking through His servant Paul and others, but because, as Paul believed, that Lord, who had spoken with human lips words which it was pos-

sible for a man to utter when He was here on earth, when caught up into the third heaven was still speaking to men, even according to His own promise, which He gave at the very close of His career, 'I have declared Thy name unto My brethren, and *will* declare it.' So, though 'He began both to do and to teach' before He was taken up, after His Ascension He continues both the doing and the tuition. And, in verity, we all may hear His voice speaking in the depths of our hearts; speaking through the renewed conscience; speaking by that Spirit who will guide us into all the truth that we need; speaking through the ages to all who will listen to His voice.

The conception of Christ as a Teacher, which is held by many who deny His redeeming work and dismiss as incredible His divinity, seems to me altogether inadequate, unless it be supplemented by the belief that He now has and exercises the power of communicating wisdom and knowledge and warning and stimulus to waiting hearts; and that when we hear within the depth of our souls the voice saying to us, 'This is the way, walk ye in it,' or saying to us, 'Pass not by, enter not into it,' if we have waited for Him, and studied His example and character, and sought, not to please ourselves, but to be led by His wisdom, we may be sure that it is Christ Himself who speaks. Reverence the inward monitor, and when He within thy heart, by His Spirit, calls thee, do thou answer, 'Speak, Lord! Thy servant heareth.' 'Ye have learned Christ if so be that ye have hearkened to Him.'

II. Secondly, mark the condition of learning the Lesson and hearing the Teacher.

Our Authorised Version, in accordance with its very frequent practice, has evacuated the last words of my

text of their true force by the substitution of the more intelligible '*by Him*' for what the Apostle writes—'*in Him*.' The true rendering gives us the condition on which we learn our Lesson and hear our Teacher. '*In Him*' is no mere surplusage, and is not to be weakened down, as this translation of ours does, into a mere '*by Him*,' but it declares that, unless we keep ourselves in union with Jesus Christ, His voice will not be heard in our hearts, and the lesson will pass unlearned.

You know, dear brother, how emphatically and continually in the New Testament this doctrine of the dwelling of the believing soul in Christ, and the reciprocal dwelling of Christ in the believing soul, is insisted upon. And I, for my part, believe that one great cause of the unsatisfactory condition of the average Christianity of this day is the slurring over and minimising of these twin great and solemn truths. I would fain bring you back to the Master's words, as declaring the deepest truths in relation to the connection between the believing soul and the Christ in whom it believes:—'*Abide in Me, and I in you.*' I wish you would go home and take this Epistle to the Ephesians and read it over, putting a pencil mark below each place in which occurs the words '*in Christ Jesus.*' I think you would learn something if you would do it.

But all that I have to say at present is that, if we would keep ourselves, by faith, by love, by meditation, by aspiration, by the submission of the will, and by practical obedience, in Jesus Christ, enclosed in Him as it were—then, and then only, should we learn His lesson, and then, and then only, should we hear Him speak. Why! if you never think about Him, how can you learn Him? If you seldom, or sleepily, take up

your Bibles and read the Gospels, of what good is His example to you? If you wander away into all manner of regions of thought and enjoyment instead of keeping near to Him, how can you expect that He will communicate Himself to you? If we keep ourselves in touch with that Lord, if we bring all our actions to Him, and measure our conduct by His pattern, then we shall learn His lesson. What does a student in a school of design do? He puts his feeble copy of some great picture beside the original, and compares it touch for touch, line for line, shade for shade, and so corrects its errors. Take your lives to the Exemplar in that fashion, and go over them bit by bit. Is *this* like Jesus Christ; is *that* what He would have done? Then '*in Him*,' thus in contact with Him, thus correcting our daubs by the perfect picture, we shall learn our lesson and listen to our Teacher.

Still your passions, muzzle your inclinations, clap a bridle on your will, and, as some tumultuous crowd would be hushed into silence that they might listen to the king speaking to them, make a great silence in your hearts, and you will 'hear Him' and be taught 'in Him.'

III. Lastly, the test and result of having learned the Lesson and listened to the Teacher is unlikeness to surrounding corruption.

'Ye have *not* so learned Christ.' Of course the hideous immoralities of Ephesus are largely, but by no means altogether, gone from Manchester. Of course, nineteen centuries of Christianity have to a very large extent changed the tone of society and influenced the moral judgments and practices even of persons who are not Christians. But there still remains a *world*, and there still remains unfilled up the gulf between

the worldly and the godly life. And I believe it is just as needful as ever it was, though in different ways, for Christians to exhibit unlikeness to the world. 'Not so,' must be our motto; or, as the Jewish patriot said, 'So did not I, because of the fear of the Lord.'

I do not wish you to make yourselves singular; I do not wish you to wear conventional badges of unlikeness to certain selected evil habits. A Christian man's unlikeness to the world consists a great deal more in doing or being what it does not do and is not than in not doing or being what it does and is. It is easy to abstain from conventional things; it is a great deal harder to put in practice the unworldly virtues of the Christian character.

There are wide regions of life in which all men must act alike, be they saints or sinners, be they believers, Agnostics, Mohammedans, Turks, Jews, or anything else. There are two ways of doing the same thing. If two women were sitting at a grindstone, one of them a Christian and the other not, the one that pushed her handle half round the circle for Christ's sake would do it in a different fashion from the other one who took it from her hand and brought it round to the other side of the stone, and did it without reference to God.

Brethren, be sure of this, that if you and I do not find in ourselves the impulse to abstain from coarse enjoyments, to put our feet upon passions and desires, appetites and aims, which godless men recognise and obey without qualm or restraint, we need to ask ourselves: 'In what sense am I a Christian, or in what sense have I heard Christ?' It is a poor affair to fling away our faithful protest against the world's evils for the sake of receiving the world's smile. Modern Chris-

tianity is often not vital enough to be hated by a godless world; and it is not hated because it only deserves to be scorned. Keep near Jesus Christ, live in the light of His face, drink in the inspiration and instruction of His example, and the unlikeness will come, and no mistake. Dwell near Him, keep in Him, and the likeness will come, as it always comes to lovers, who grow to resemble that or those whom they love. 'It is enough for the disciple to be as his Teacher, and for the slave to be like his Lord.'

A DARK PICTURE AND A BRIGHT HOPE

'That ye put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts.'—EPH. iv. 22.

IF a doctor knows that he can cure a disease he can afford to give full weight to its gravest symptoms. If he knows he cannot he is sorely tempted to say it is of slight importance, and, though it cannot be cured, can be endured without much discomfort.

And so the Scripture teachings about man's real moral condition are characterised by two peculiarities which, at first sight, seem somewhat opposed, but are really harmonious and closely connected. There is no book and no system in the whole world that takes such a dark view of what you and I are; there is none animated with so bright and confident a hope of what you and I may become. And, on the other hand, the common run of thought amongst men minimises the fact of sin, but when you say, 'Well, be it big or little, can I get rid of it anyhow?' there is no answer to give that is worth listening to. Christ alone can venture to tell men what they are, because Christ

alone can radically change their whole nature and being. There are certain diseases of which a constant symptom is unconsciousness that there is anything the matter. A deep-seated wound does not hurt much. The question is not whether Christian thoughts about a man's condition are gloomy or not, but whether they are true. As to their being gloomy, it seems to me that the people who complain of our doctrine of human nature, as giving a melancholy view of men, do really take a far more melancholy one. We believe in a fall, and we believe in a possible and actual restoration. The man to whom evil is not an intrusive usurper can have no confidence that it will ever be expelled. Which is the gloomy system—that which paints in undisguised blackness the facts of life, and over against their blackest darkness, the radiant light of a great hope shining bright and glorious, or one that paints humanity in a uniform monotone of indistinguishable grey involving the past, the present, and the future—which, believing in no disease, hopes for no cure? My text, taken in conjunction with the grand words which follow, about 'The new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness,' brings before us some very solemn views (which the men that want them most realise the least) with regard to what we are, what we ought to be and cannot be, and what, by God's help, we may become. The old man is 'corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,' says Paul. *There* are a set of characteristics, then, of the universal sinful human self. Then there comes a hopeless commandment—a mockery—if we are to stop with it, 'put it off.' And then there dawns on us the blessed hope and possibility of the fulfilment of the injunction, when we learn that 'the truth in Jesus' is, that we put

off the old man with his deeds. Such is a general outline of the few thoughts I have to suggest to you.

I. I wish to fix, first of all, upon the very significant, though brief, outline sketch of the facts of universal sinful human nature which the Apostle gives here.

These are three, upon which I dilate for a moment or two. 'The old man' is a Pauline expression, about which I need only say here that we may take it as meaning that form of character and life which is common to us all, apart from the great change operated through faith in Jesus Christ. It is universal, it is sinful. There is a very remarkable contrast, which you will notice, between the verse upon which I am now commenting and the following one. The old man is set over against the new. One is created, the other is corrupted, as the word might be properly rendered. The one is created after God, the other is rotting to pieces under the influence of its lusts. The one consists of righteousness and holiness, which have their root in truth; the other is under the dominion of passions and desires, which, in themselves evil, are the instruments of and are characterised by deceit.

The first of the characteristics, then, of this sinful self, to which I wish to point for a moment is, that every Christless life, whatsoever the superficial differences in it, is really a life shaped according to and under the influence of *passionate desires*. You see I venture to alter one word of my text, and that for this simple reason; the word 'lusts' has, in modern English, assumed a very much narrower signification than either that of the original has, or than itself had in English when this translation was made. It is a very remarkable testimony, by the by, to the weak point in the bulk of men—to the side of their nature which is

most exposed to assaults—that this word, which originally meant strong desire of any kind, should, by the observation of the desires that are strongest in the mass of people, have come to be restricted and confined to the one specific meaning of strong animal, fleshly, sensuous desires. It may point a lesson to some of my congregation, and especially to the younger portion of the men in it. Remember, my brother, that the part of your nature which is closest to the material is likewise closest to the animal, and is least under dominion (without a strong and constant effort) of the power which will save the flesh from corruption, and make the material the vehicle of the spiritual and divine. Many a young man comes into Manchester with the atmosphere of a mother's prayers and a father's teaching round about him; with holy thoughts and good resolutions beginning to sway his heart and spirit; and flaunting profligacy and seducing tongues beside him in the counting-house, in the warehouse, and at the shop counter, lead him away into excesses that banish all these, and, after a year or two of riot and sowing to the flesh, he 'of the flesh reaps corruption,' and that very literally—in sunken eye, and trembling hand, and hacking cough, and a grave opened for him before his time. Ah, my dear young friends! 'they promise them liberty.' It is a fine thing to get out of your father's house, and away from the restrictions of the society where you are known, and loving eyes—or unloving ones—are watching you. It is a fine thing to get into the freedom and irresponsibility of a big city! 'They promise them liberty,' and 'they themselves become the bond slaves of corruption.'

But, then, that is only the grossest and the lowest form of the truth that is here. Paul's indictment

against us is not anything so exaggerated and extreme as that the animal nature predominates in all who are not Christ's. That is not true, and is not what my text says. But what it says is just this: that, given the immense varieties of tastes and likings and desires which men have, the point and characteristic feature of every godless life is that, be these what they may, they become the dominant power in that life. Paul does not, of course, deny that the sway and tyranny of such lusts and desires are sometimes broken by remonstrances of conscience; sometimes suppressed by considerations of prudence; sometimes by habit, by business, by circumstances that force people into channels into which they would not naturally let their lives run. He does not deny that often and often in such a life there will be a dim desire for something better—that high above the black and tumbling ocean of that life of corruption and disorder, there lies a calm heaven with great stars of duty shining in it. He does not deny that men are a law to themselves, as well as a bundle of desires which they obey; but what he charges upon us, and what I venture to bring as an indictment against you, and myself too, is this: that apart from Christ it is not conscience that rules our lives; that apart from Christ it is not sense of duty that is strongest; that apart from Christ the real directing impulse to which the inward proclivities, if not the outward activities, do yield in the main and on the whole, is, as this text says, the things that we like, the passionate desires of nature, the sensuous and godless heart.

And you say, 'Well, if it is so, what harm is it? Did not God make me with these desires, and am not I meant to gratify them?' Yes, certainly. The harm of it is, first of all, this, that it is an inversion of the true

order. The passionate desires about which I am speaking, be they for money, be they for fame, or be they for any other of the gilded baits of worldly joys—these passionate dislikes and likings, as well as the purely animal ones—the longing for food, for drink, for any other physical gratification—these were never meant to be men's guides. They are meant to be impulses. They have motive power, but no directing power. Do you start engines out of a railway station without drivers or rails to run upon? It would be as reasonable as that course of life which men pursue who say, 'Thus I wish; thus I command; let my desire stand in the place of other argumentation and reason.' They take that part of their nature that is meant to be under the guidance of reason and conscience looking up to God, and put it in the supreme place, and so, setting a beggar on horseback, ride where we know such equestrians are said in the end to go! The desires are meant to be impelling powers. It is absurdity and the destruction of true manhood to make them, as we so often do, directing powers, and to put the reins into their hand. They are the wind, not the helm; the steam, not the driver. Let us keep things in their right places. Remember that the constitution of human nature, as God has meant it, is this: down there, under hatches, under control, the strong impulses; above them, the enlightened understanding; above that, the conscience, which has a loftier region than that of thought to move in, the moral region; and above that, the God, whose face, shining down upon the apex of the nature thus constituted, irradiates it with light which filters through all the darkness, down to the very base of the being; and sanctifies the animal, and subdues the impulses, and enlightens the

understanding, and calms and quickens the conscience, and makes ductile and pliable the will, and fills the heart with fruition and tranquillity, and orders the life after the image of Him that created it.

I cannot dwell any longer on this first point; but I hope that I have said enough, not to show that the words are true—that is a very poor thing to do, if that were all that I aimed at—but to bring them home to some of our hearts and consciences. I pray God to impress the conviction that, although there be in us all the voice of conscience, which all of us more or less have tried at intervals to follow; yet in the main it abides for ever true—and it is true, my dear brethren, about you—a Christless life is a life under the dominion of tyrannous desires. Ask yourself what I cannot ask for you, Is it I? My hand fumbles about the hinges and handle of the door of the heart. You yourself must open it and let conviction come in!

Still further, the words before us add another touch to this picture. They not only represent the various passionate desires as being the real guides of 'the old man,' but they give this other characteristic—that these desires are in their very nature the instruments of deceit and lies.

The words of my text are, perhaps, rather enfeebled by the form of rendering which our translators have here, as in many cases, thought proper to adopt. If, instead of reading 'corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,' we read 'corrupt according to the desires of deceit,' we should have got not only the contrast between the old man and the new man, 'created in righteousness and holiness of truth'—but we should have had, perhaps, a clearer notion of the characteristic of these lusts, which the Apostle meant to bring into promi-

nence. These desires are, as it were, the tools and instruments by which deceit betrays and mocks men; the weapons used by illusions and lies to corrupt and mar the soul. They are strong, and their nature is to pursue after their objects without regard to any consequences beyond their own gratification; but, strong as they are, they are like the blinded Samson, and will pull the house down on themselves if they be not watched. Their strength is excited on false pretences. They are stirred to grasp what is after all a lie. They are 'desires of deceit.'

That just points to the truth of all such life being hollow and profitless. If regard be had to the whole scope of our nature and necessities, and to the true aim of life as deduced therefrom, nothing is more certain than that no man will get the satisfaction that his ruling passions promise him, by indulging them. It is very sure that the way never to get what you need and desire is always to do what you like.

And that for very plain reasons. Because, for one thing, the object only satisfies for a time. Yesterday's food appeased our hunger for the day, but we wake hungry again. And the desires which are not so purely animal have the same characteristic of being stilled for the moment, and of waking more ravenous than ever. 'He that drinketh of this water shall thirst again.' Because, further, the desire grows and the object of it does not. The fierce longing increases, and, of course, the power of the thing that we pursue to satisfy it decreases in the same proportion. It is a fixed quantity; the appetite is indefinitely expansible. And so, the longer I go on feeding my desire, the more I long for the food; and the more I long for it, the less taste it has when I get it. It must be more strongly spiced to

titillate a jaded palate. And there soon comes to be an end of the possibilities in that direction. A man scarcely tastes his brandy, and has little pleasure in drinking it, but he cannot do without it, and so he gulps it down in bigger and bigger draughts till delirium tremens comes in to finish all. Because, for another thing, after all, these desires are each but a fragment of one's whole nature, and when one is satisfied another is baying to be fed. The grim brute, like the watchdog of the old mythology, has three heads, and each gaping for honey cakes. And if they were all gorged, there are other longings in men's nature that will not let them rest, and for which all the leeks and onions of Egypt are not food. So long as these are unmet, you 'spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not.'

So we may lay it down as a universal truth, that whoever takes it for his law to do as he likes will not for long like what he does; or, as George Herbert says,

'Shadows well mounted, dreams in a career,
Embroider'd lies, nothing between two dishes—
These are the pleasures here.'

Do any of you remember the mournful words with which one of our greatest modern writers of fiction closes his saddest, truest book: 'Ah! *vanitas vanitatum!* Which of us is happy in this world? which of us has his desire? or, having it, is satisfied?' No wonder that with such a view of human life as that the next and last sentence should be, 'Come, children, let us shut up the box and the puppets, for the play is played out.' Yes! if there be nothing more to follow than the desires which deceive, man's life, with all its bustle and

emotion, is a subject for cynical and yet sad regard, and all the men and women that toil and fret are 'merely players.'

Then, again, one more point in this portraiture of 'the old man,' is that *these deceiving desires corrupt*. The language of our text conveys a delicate shade of meaning which is somewhat blurred in our version. Properly, it speaks of 'the old man which is *growing* corrupt,' rather than 'which is corrupt,' and expresses the steady advance of that inward process of decay and deterioration which is ever the fate of a life subordinated to these desires. And this growing evil, or rather inward eating corruption which disintegrates and destroys a soul, is contrasted in the subsequent verse with the 'new man which is *created* in righteousness.' There is in the one the working of life, in the other the working of death. The one is formed and fashioned by the loving hands and quickening breath of God; the other is gradually and surely rotting away by the eating leprosy of sin. For the former the end is eternal life; for the latter, the second death.

And the truth that underlies that awful representation is the familiar one to which I have already referred in another connection, that, by the very laws of our nature, by the plain necessities of the case, all our moral qualities, be they good or bad, tend to increase by exercise. In whatever direction we move, the rate of progress tends to accelerate itself. And this is pre-eminently the case when the motion is downwards. Every day that a bad man lives he is a worse man. My friend! you are on a sloping descent. Imperceptibly—because you will not look at the landmarks—but really, and not so very slowly either; convictions are dying out, impulses to good are becoming feeble,

habits of neglect of conscience are becoming fixed, special forms of sin—avarice, or pride, or lust—are striking their claws deeper into your soul, and holding their bleeding booty firmer. In all regions of life exercise strengthens capacity. The wrestler, according to the old Greek parable, who began by carrying a calf on his shoulders, got to carry an ox by and by.

It is a solemn thought this of the steady continuous aggravation of sin in the individual character. Surely nothing can be small which goes to make up that rapidly growing total. Beware of the little beginnings which 'eat as doth a canker.' Beware of the slightest deflection from the straight line of right. If there be two lines, one straight and the other going off at the sharpest angle, you have only to produce both far enough, and there will be room between them for all the space that separates hell from heaven! Beware of lading your souls with the weight of small single sins. We heap upon ourselves, by slow, steady accretion through a lifetime, the weight that, though it is gathered by grains, crushes the soul. There is nothing heavier than sand. You may lift it by particles. It drifts in atoms, but heaped upon a man it will break his bones, and blown over the land it buries pyramid and sphynx, the temples of gods and the homes of men beneath its barren solid waves. The leprosy gnaws the flesh off a man's bones, and joints and limbs drop off—he is a living death. So with every soul that is under the dominion of these lying desires—it is slowly rotting away piecemeal, 'waxing corrupt according to the lusts of deceit.'

II. Note how, this being so, we have here the hopeless command to put off the old man.

That command 'put it off' is the plain dictate of con-

science and of common sense. But it seems as hopeless as it is imperative. I suppose everybody feels sometimes, more or less distinctly, that they ought to make an effort and get rid of these beggarly usurpers that tyrannise over will, and conscience, and life. Attempts enough are made to shake off the yoke. We have all tried some time or other. Our days are full of foiled resolutions, attempts that have broken down, unsuccessful rebellions, ending like the struggles of some snared wild creature, in wrapping the meshes tighter round us. How many times, since you were a boy or a girl, have you said—‘Now I am *determined* that I will never do that again. I have flung away opportunities. I have played the fool and erred exceedingly—but I now turn over a new leaf!’ Yes, and you have turned it—and, if I might go on with the metaphor, the first gust of passion or temptation has blown the leaf back again, and the old page has been spread before you once more just as it used to be. The history of individual souls and the tragedy of the world’s history recurring in every age, in which the noblest beginnings lead to disastrous ends, and each new star of promise that rises on the horizon leads men into quagmires and sets in blood, sufficiently show how futile the attempt in our own strength to overcome and expel the evils that are rooted in our nature.

Moralists may preach, ‘Unless above himself he can erect himself, how mean a thing is man’; but all the preaching in the world is of no avail. The task is an impossibility. The stream cannot rise above its source, nor be purified in its flow if bitter waters come from the fountain. ‘Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?’ There is no power in human nature to cast off this clinging self. As in the awful vision of the

poet, the serpent is grown into the man. The will is feeble for good, the conscience sits like a discrowned king issuing empty mandates, while all his realm is up in rebellion and treats his proclamations as so much waste paper. How can a man re-make himself? how cast off his own nature? The means at his disposal themselves need to be cleansed, for themselves are tainted. It is the old story—who will keep the keepers?—who will heal the sick physicians? You will sometimes see a wounded animal licking its wounds with its own tongue. How much more hopeless still is our effort by our own power to stanch and heal the gashes which sin has made! ‘Put off the old man’—yes—and if it but clung to the limbs like the hero’s poisoned vest, it might be possible. But it is not a case of throwing aside clothing, it is stripping oneself of the very skin and flesh—and if there is nothing more to be said than such vain commonplaces of impossible duty, then we must needs abandon hope, and wear the rotting evil till we die.

But that is not all. ‘What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh,’ God sending His own Son did—He condemned sin in the flesh. So we come to

III. The possibility of fulfilling the command.

The context tells us how this is possible. The law, the pattern, and the power for complete victory over the old sinful self, are to be found, ‘as the truth is—in Jesus.’ Union with Christ gives us a real possession of a new principle of life, derived from Him, and like His own. That real, perfect, immortal life, which hath no kindred with evil, and flings off pollution and decay from its pure surface, will wrestle with and finally overcome the living death of obedience to the deceitful

lusts. Our weakness will be made vigorous by His inbreathed power. Our gravitation to earth and sin will be overcome by the yearning of that life to its source. An all-constraining motive will be found in love to Him who has given Himself for us. A new hope will spring as to what may be possible for us, when we see Jesus, and in Him recognise the true Man, whose image we may bear. We shall die with Him to sin, when, resting by faith on Him who has died for sin, we are made conformable to His death, that we may walk in newness of life. Faith in Jesus gives us a share in the working of that mighty power by which He makes all things new. The renovation blots out the past, and changes the direction of the future. The fountain in our hearts sends forth bitter waters that cannot be healed. 'And the Lord showed him a tree,' even that Cross whereon Christ was crucified for us, 'which, when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet.'

I remember a rough parable of Luther's, grafted on an older legend, on this matter, which runs somewhat in this fashion: A man's heart is like a foul stable. Wheelbarrows and shovels are of little use, except to remove some of the surface filth, and to litter all the passages in the process. What is to be done with it? 'Turn the Elbe into it,' says he. The flood will sweep away all the pollution. Not my own efforts, but the influx of that pardoning, cleansing grace which is in Christ will wash away the accumulations of years, and the ingrained evil which has stained every part of my being. We cannot cleanse ourselves, we cannot 'put off' this old nature which has struck its roots so deep into our being; but if we turn to Him with faith and say—Forgive me, and cleanse, and strip from me the

foul and ragged robe fit only for the swine-troughs in the far-off land of disobedience, He will receive us and answer all our desires, and cast around us the pure garment of His own righteousness. 'The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus shall make us free from the law of sin and death.'

THE NEW MAN

'And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.'—EPH. iv. 24.

WE had occasion to remark in a former sermon that Paul regards this and the preceding clauses as the summing up of 'the truth in Jesus'; or, in other words, he considers the radical transformation and renovation of the whole moral nature as being the purpose of the revelation of God in Christ. To this end they have 'heard Him.' To this end they have 'learned Him.' To this end they have been 'taught in Him,' receiving, by union with Him, all the various processes of His patient discipline. This is the inmost meaning of all the lessons in that great school in which all Christians are scholars, and Christ is the teacher and the theme, and union to Him the condition of entrance, and the manifold workings of His providence and His grace the instruments of training, and heaven the home when school time is over—that we should become new men in Christ Jesus.

This great practical issue is set forth here under three aspects—one negative, two positive. The negative process is single and simple—'put off the old man.' The positive is double—a spiritual 'renewal' effected in our spirits, in the deep centre of our personal being,

by that Divine Spirit who, dwelling in us, is 'the spirit of our minds'; and then, consequent upon that inward renewal, a renovation of life and character, which is described as being the 'putting on,' as if it were a garment, of 'the new man,' created by a divine act, and consisting in moral and spiritual likeness to God. It is not necessary to deal, except incidentally, with the two former, but I desire to consider the last of these—the putting on of the new man—a little more closely, and to try to bring out the wealth and depth of the Apostle's words in this wonderful text.

The ideas contained seem to me in brief to be these—the great purpose of the Gospel is our moral renewal; that moral renewal is a creation after God's image; that new creation has to be put on or appropriated by us; the great means of appropriating it is contact with God's truth. Let us consider these points in order.

I. The great purpose of the Gospel is our moral renewal; 'the new man . . . created in righteousness and . . . holiness.'

Now, of course, there are other ways of stating the end of the Gospel. This is by no means an exhaustive setting forth of its purpose. We may say that Christ has come in order that men may know God. We may say that He comes in order that the Divine Love, which ever delights to communicate, may bestow itself, and may conceive of the whole majestic series of acts of self-revelation from the beginning as being—if I may so say—for the gratification of that impulse to impart itself, which is the characteristic of love in God and man. We may say that the purpose of the whole is the deliverance of men from the burden and guilt of sin. But whether we speak of the end of the Gospel as the glory of God, or the blessedness of man, or as here,

as being the moral perfection of the individual or of the race, they are all but various phrases of the one complete truth. The Gospel is the consequence and the manifestation of the love of God, which delights to be known and possessed by loving souls, and being known, changes them into its own likeness, which to know is to be happy, which to resemble is to be pure.

The first thing that strikes me about this representation of our text is the profound sense of human sinfulness which underlies it.

The language is utterly unmeaning—or at all events grossly exaggerated—unless all have sinned, and the nature which belongs to men universally, apart from the transforming power of Christ's Spirit, be corrupt and evil. And that it is so is the constant view of Scripture. The Bible notion of what men need in order to be pure and good is very different from the superficial notions of worldly moralists and philanthropists. We hear a great deal about 'culture,' as if all that were needed were the training and strengthening of the nature, as if what was mainly needed was the development of the understanding. We hear about 'reformation' from some who look rather deeper than the superficial apostles of culture. And how singularly the very word proclaims the insufficiency of the remedy which it suggests! 'Re-formation' affects form and not substance. It puts the old materials into a new shape. Exactly so—and much good may be expected from that! They are the old materials still, and it matters comparatively little how they are arranged. It is not re-formation, but re-novation, or, to go deeper still, re-generation, that the world needs; not new forms, but a new life; not the culture and development

of what it has in itself, but extirpation of the old by the infusion of something new and pure that has no taint of corruption, nor any contact with evil. 'Verily, I say unto you, ye must be born again.'

All slighter notions of the need and more superficial diagnoses of the disease lead to a treatment with palliatives which never touch the true seat of the mischief. The poison flowers may be plucked, but the roots live on. It is useless to build dykes to keep out the wild waters. Somewhere or other they will find a way through. The only real cure is that which only the Creating hand can effect, who, by slow operation of some inward agency, can raise the level of the low lands, and lift them above the threatening waves. What is needed is a radical transformation, going down to the very roots of the being; and that necessity is clearly implied in the language of this text, which declares that a nature possessing righteousness and holiness is 'a new man' to be 'put on' as from without, not to be evolved as from within.

It is to be further noticed what the Apostle specifies as the elements, or characteristics of this new nature—righteousness and holiness.

The proclamation of a new nature in Christ Jesus, great and precious truth as it is, has often been connected with teaching which has been mystical in the bad sense of that word, and has been made the stalking horse of practical immorality. But here we have it distinctly defined in what that new nature consists. There is no vague mystery about it, no tampering with the idea of personality. The people who put on the new man are the same people after as before. The newness consists in moral and spiritual characteristics. And these are all summed up in the two—righteousness

and holiness. To which is added in the substantially parallel passage in Colossians, 'Renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created Him,' where, I suppose, we must regard the 'knowledge' as meaning that personal knowledge and acquaintance which has its condition in love, and is the foundation of the more purely moral qualities of which our text speaks.

Is there, then, any distinction between these two? I think there is very obviously so. 'Righteousness' is, I suppose, to be understood here in its narrower meaning of observance of what is right, the squaring of conduct according to a solemn sovereign law of duty. Substantially it is equivalent to the somewhat heathenish word 'morality,' and refers human conduct and character to a law or standard. What, then, is 'holiness'? It is the same general conduct and character, considered, however, under another aspect, and in another relation. It involves the reference of life and self to God, consecration to, and service of Him. It is not a mere equivalent of purity, but distinctly carries the higher reference. The obedience now is not to a law but to a Lord. The perfection now does not consist in conformity to an ideal standard, but in likeness and devotion to God. That which I ought to do is that which my Father in heaven wills. Or, if the one word may roughly represent the more secular word 'morality,' the other may roughly represent the less devout phrase, 'practical religion.'

These are 'new,' as actually realised in human nature. Paul thinks that we shall not possess them except as a consequence of renovation. But they are not 'new' in the sense that the contents of Christian morality are different from the contents of the law written on

men's hearts. The Gospel proclaims and produces no fantastic ethics of its own. The actions which it stamps in its mint are those which pass current in all lands—not a provincial coinage, but recognised as true in ring, and of full weight everywhere. Do not fancy that Christian righteousness is different from ordinary 'goodness,' except as being broader and deeper, more thorough-going, more imperative. Divergences there are, for our law is more than a republication of the law written on men's hearts. Though the one agrees with the other, yet the area which they cover is not the same. The precepts of the one, like some rock-hewn inscriptions by forgotten kings, are weathered and indistinct, often illegible, often misread, often neglected. The other is written in living characters in a perfect life. It includes all that the former attempts to enjoin, and much more besides. It alters the perspective, so to speak, of heathen morals, and brings into prominence graces overlooked or despised by them. It breathes a deeper meaning and a tenderer beauty into the words which express human conceptions of virtue, but it does take up these into itself. And instead of setting up a 'righteousness' which is peculiar to itself, and has nothing to do with the world's morality, Christianity says, as Christ has taught us, 'Except your righteousness *exceed* the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of God.' The same apostle who here declares that actual righteousness and holiness are new things on the earth, allows full force to whatsoever weight may be in the heathen notion of 'virtue,' and adopts the words and ideas which he found ready made to his hands, in that notion—as fitly describing the Christian graces which he enjoined. Grecian moralists supplied him with the

names true, honest, just, and pure. His 'righteousness' accepted these as included within its scope. And we have to remember that we are not invested with that new nature, unless we are living in the exercise of these common and familiar graces which the consciences and hearts of all the world recognise for 'lovely' and 'of good report,' hail as 'virtue,' and crown with 'praise.'

So, then, let me pause here for a moment to urge you to take these thoughts as a very sharp and salutary test. You call yourselves Christian people. The purpose of your Christianity is your growth and perfecting in simple purity, and devotion to, and dependence on, our loving Father. Our religion is nothing unless it leads to these. Otherwise it is like a plant that never seeds, but may bear some feeble blossoms that drop shrunken to the ground before they mature. To very many of us the old solemn remonstrance should come with awakening force—'Ye did run well, what did hinder you?' You have apprehended Christ as the revealer and bringer of the great mercy of God, and have so been led in some measure to put your confidence in Him for your salvation and deliverance. But have you apprehended Him as the mould into which your life is to be poured, that life having been made fluent and plastic by the warmth of His love? You have apprehended Him as your refuge; have you apprehended Him as your inward sanctity? You have gone to Him as the source of salvation from the guilt and penalties of sin; have you gone to Him, and are you daily growing in the conscious possession of Him, as the means of salvation from the corruption and evil of sin? He comes to make us good. What has He made you? Anything different from what you were

twenty years ago? Then, if not, and in so far as you are unchanged and unbettered, the Gospel is a failure for you, and you are untrue to it. The great purpose of all the work of Christ—His life, His sorrows, His passion, His resurrection, His glory, His continuous operation by the Spirit and the word—is to make new men who shall be just and devout, righteous and holy.

II. A second principle contained in these words, is that this moral Renewal is a Creation in the image of God.

The new man is 'created after the image of God'—that is, of course, according to or in the likeness of God. There is evident reference here to the account of man's creation in Genesis, and the idea is involved that this new man is the restoration and completion of that earlier likeness, which, in some sense, has faded out of the features and form of our sinful souls. It is to be remembered, however, that there is an image of God inseparable from human nature, and not effaceable by any obscuring or disturbance caused by sin. Man's likeness to God consists in his being a person, possessed of a will and self-consciousness, and that mysterious gift of personality abides whatever perishes. But beyond that natural image of God, as we may call it, there is something else which fades wholly with the first breath of evil, like the reflexion of the sky on some windless sea. The natural likeness remains, and without it no comparison would be possible. We should not think of saying that a stone or an eagle were unlike God. But while the personal being makes comparison fitting, what makes the true contrast? In what respect is man unlike God? In moral antagonism. What is the true likeness? Moral harmony. What

separates men from their Father in heaven? Is it that His 'years are throughout all generations,' and 'my days are as an handbreadth'? Is it that His power is infinite, and mine all thwarted by other might and ever tending to weakness and extinction? Is it that His wisdom, sunlike, waxes not nor wanes, and there is nothing hid from its beams, while my knowledge, like the lesser light, shines by reflected radiance, serves but to make the night visible, and is crescent and decaying, changeful and wandering? No. All such distinctions based upon what people call the sovereign attributes of God—the distinctions of creator and created, infinite and finite, omnipotent and weak, eternal and transient—make no real gulf between God and man. If we have only to say, 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are' His 'ways higher than' our 'ways,' that difference is not unlikeness, and establishes no separation; for low and flat though the dull earth be, does not heaven bend down round it, and send rain and sun, dew and blessing? But it is because 'your ways are not as my ways'—because there is actual opposition, because the *directions* are different—that there is unlikeness. The image of God lies not only in that personality which the 'Father of Lies' too possesses, but in 'righteousness and holiness.'

But besides this reference to the original creation of man, there is another reason for the representation of the new nature as being a work of divine creative power. It is in order to give the most emphatic expression possible to the truth that we do not make our righteousness for ourselves, but receive it as from Him. The new man is not our work, it is God's creation. As at the beginning, the first human life is represented as not originated in the line of natural cause and effect,

but as a new and supernatural commencement, so in every Christian soul the life which is derived from God, and will unfold itself in His likeness, comes from His own breath inbreathed into the nostrils. It too is out of the line of natural causes. It too is a direct gift from God. It too is a true supernatural being—a real and new creation.

May I venture a step further? 'The new man' is spoken of here as if it had existence ere we 'put it on.' I do not press that, as if it necessarily involved the idea which I am going to suggest, for the peculiar form of expression is probably only due to the exigencies of the metaphor. Still it may not be altogether foreign to the whole scope of the passage, if I remind you that the new man, the true likeness of God, has, indeed, a real existence apart from our assumption of it. Of course, the righteousness and holiness which make that new nature in me have no being till they become mine. But we believe that the righteousness and holiness which we make ours come from another, who bestows them on us. 'The new man' is not a mere ideal, but has a historical and a present existence. The ideal has lived and lives, is a human person, even Jesus Christ the express image of the Father, who is the beginning of the new creation, who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness. That fair vision of a humanity detached from all consequences of sin, renewed in perfect beauty, stainless and Godlike, is no unsubstantial dream, but a simple fact. He ever liveth. His word to us is, 'I counsel thee to buy of me—white raiment.' And a full parallel to the words of our text, which bid us 'put on the new man, created after God in righteousness and holiness,' is found in the other words of the same Apostle—'Let us cast off the works

of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ.'

In accordance with this—

III. It is further to be noticed that this new creation has to be put on and appropriated by us.

The same idea which, as I have already remarked, is conveyed by the image of a new creation, is reiterated in this metaphor of putting on the new nature, as if it were a garment. Our task is not to weave it, but to wear it. It is made and ready.

And that process of assumption or putting on has two parts. We are clothed upon with Christ in a double way, or rather in a double sense. We are 'found in Him not having our own righteousness,' but invested with His for our pardon and acceptance. We are clothed with His righteousness for our purifying and sanctifying.

Both are the conditions of our being like God. Both are the gifts of God. The one, however, is an act; the other a process. Both are received. The one is received on condition of simple faith; the other is received by the medium of faithful effort. Both are included in the wide conception of salvation, but the law for the one is 'Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but by His mercy He saved us'; and the law for the other is—'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.' Both come from Christ, but for the one we have the invitation, 'Buy of Me white raiment that thou mayest be clothed'; and for the other we have the command, 'Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh.' There is the assumption of His righteousness which makes a man a Christian, and has for its condition simple faith. There is the assumption of His righteousness sanctifying and

transforming us which follows in a Christian course, as its indispensable accompaniment and characteristic, and that is realised by daily and continuous effort.

And one word about the manner, the effort as set forth here; twofold, as I have already pointed out—a negative and positive. We are not concerned here with the relations of these amongst themselves, but I may remark that there is no growth in holiness possible without the constant accompanying process of excision and crucifixion of the old. If you want to grow purer and liker Christ, you must slay yourselves. You cannot gird on ‘righteousness’ above the old self, as some beggar might buckle to himself royal velvet with its ermine over his filthy tatters. There must be a putting off in order to and accompanying the putting on. Strip yourselves of yourselves, and then you ‘shall not be found naked,’ but clothed with the garments of salvation, as the bride with the robe which is the token of the bridegroom’s love, and the pledge of her espousals to him.

And let nobody wonder that the Apostle here commands us, as by our own efforts, to put on and make ours what is in many other places of Scripture treated as God’s gift. These earnest exhortations are perfectly consistent with the belief that all comes from God. Our faithful adherence to our Lord and Master, our honest efforts in His strength to secure more and more of His likeness, determine the extent to which we shall possess that likeness. The new nature is God’s gift, and it is given to us according to His own fulness indeed, but also according to the measure of our faith. Blessed be His name! we have nothing to do but to accept His gift. The garment with which He clothes our nakedness and hides our filth is woven in no earthly

looms. As with the first sinful pair, so with all their children since, 'the Lord God made them' the covering which they cannot make for themselves. But we have to accept it, and we have by daily toil, all our lives long, to gather it more and more closely around us, to wrap ourselves more and more completely in its ample folds. We have by effort and longing, by self-abnegation and aspiration, by prayer and work, by communion and service, to increase our possession of that likeness to God which lives in Jesus Christ, and from Him is stamped ever more and more deeply on the heart. For the strengthening of our confidence and our gratitude, we have to remember with lowly trust that it is true of us, 'If any man be in Christ he is a new creature.' For the quickening of our energy and faithful efforts we have to give heed to the command, and fulfil it in ourselves—'Be ye renewed in the Spirit of your minds, and put on the new man.'

IV. And, finally, the text contains the principle that the means of appropriating this new nature is contact with the truth.

If you will look at the margins of some Bibles you will see that our translators have placed there a rendering, which, as is not unfrequently the case, is decidedly better than that adopted by them in the text. Instead of 'true holiness,' the literal rendering is 'holiness of truth'—and the Apostle's purpose in the expression is not to particularise the quality, but the origin of the 'holiness.' It is 'of truth,' that is, produced by the holiness which flows from the truth as it is in Jesus, of which he has been speaking a moment before.

And we come, therefore, to this practical conclusion, that whilst the agent of renovation is the Divine Spirit, and the condition of renovation is our cleaving to

Christ, the medium of renovation and the weapon which transforming grace employs is 'the word of the truth of the Gospel,' whereby we are sanctified. There we get the law, and there we get the motive and the impulse. There we get the encouragement and the hope. In it, in the grand simple message—'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them,' lie the germs of all moral progress. And in proportion as we believe that—not with the cold belief of our understandings, but with the loving affiance of our hearts and our whole spiritual being—in proportion as we believe that, in that proportion shall we grow in 'knowledge,' shall we grow in 'righteousness,' in the 'image of Him that created us.' The Gospel is the great means of this change, because it is the great means by which He who works the change comes near to our understandings and our hearts.

So let us learn how impossible are righteousness and holiness, morality and religion in men, unless they flow from this source. It is the truth that sanctifies. It is the Spirit who wields that truth who sanctifies. It is Christ who sends the Spirit who sanctifies. But, brethren, beyond the range of this light is only darkness, and that nature which is not cleansed by His priestly hand laid upon it remains leprous, and he who is clothed with any other garment than His righteousness will find 'the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it.' And let us learn, on the other hand, the incompleteness and monstrosity of a professed belief in 'the truth' which does not produce this righteousness and holiness. It may be real—God forbid that we should step into His place and assume His office of discerning the thoughts of the heart, and the

genuineness of Christian professions! But, at any rate, it is no exaggeration nor presumption to say that a professed faith which is not making us daily better, gentler, simpler, purer, more truthful, more tender, more brave, more self-oblivious, more loving, more strong—more like Christ—is woefully deficient either in reality or in power—is, if genuine, ready to perish—if lit at all, smouldering to extinction. Christian men and women! is ‘the truth’ moulding you into Christ’s likeness? If not, see to it whether it be the truth which you are holding, and whether you are holding the truth or have unconsciously let it slip from a grasp numbed by the freezing coldness of the world.

And for us all, let us see that we lay to heart the large truths of this text, and give them that personal bearing without which they are of no avail. *I* need renovation in my inmost nature. Nothing can renew *my* soul but the power of Christ, who is *my* life. *I* am naked and foul. Nothing can cleanse and clothe *me* but He. The blessed truth which reveals Him calls for *my* individual faith. And if *I* put *my* confidence in that Lord, He will dwell in *my* inmost spirit, and so sway *my* affections and mould *my* will that *I* shall be transformed unto His perfect likeness. He begins with each one of us by bringing the best robe to cast over the rags of the returning prodigal. He ends not with any who trust Him, until they stand amid the hosts of the heavens who follow Him, clothed with fine linen clean and white, which is the righteousness of His Holy ones.

GRIEVING THE SPIRIT

'Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.'—EPH. iv. 30.

THE miracle of Christianity is the Incarnation. It is not a link in a chain, but a new beginning, the entrance into the cosmic order of a Divine Power. The sequel of Bethlehem and Calvary and Olivet is the upper room and the Pentecost. There is the issue of the whole mission and work of Christ—the planting in the heart of humanity of a new and divine life. All Christendom is professing to commemorate that fact to-day,¹ but a large portion of us forget that it was but a transient sign of a perpetual reality. The rushing mighty wind has died down into a calm; the fiery tongues have ceased to flicker on the disciples' heads, but the miracle, which is permanent, and is being repeated from day to day, in the experience of every believing soul, is the inrush of the very breath of God into their lives, and the plunging of them into a fiery baptism which melts their coldness and refines away their dross. Now, my text brings before us some very remarkable thoughts as to the permanent working of the Divine Spirit upon Christian souls, and upon this it bases a very tender and persuasive exhortation to conduct. And I desire simply to try to bring out the fourfold aspect in these words. There is, first, a wondrous revelation; second, a plain lesson as to what that Divine Spirit chiefly does; third, a solemn warning as to man's power and freedom to thwart it; and, lastly, a tender motive for conduct. 'Grieve not

¹ Preached on Whitsunday.

the Holy Spirit, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.'

Now let us look briefly at these four thoughts: Here we have—

I. A wonderful revelation.

Wonderful to all, startling to some. If you can speak of grief, you must be speaking of a person. An influence cannot be sorry, whatever may happen to it. And that word of my text is no mere violent metaphor or exaggeratedly strong way of suggesting a motive, but it keeps rigidly within the New Testament limits, in reference to that Divine Spirit, when to Him it attributes this personal emotion of sorrow with its correlation of possible joy.

Now, I do not need to dwell upon the thought here, but I do desire to emphasise it, especially in view of the strangely hazy and defective conceptions which so many Christian people have upon this matter. And I desire to remind you that the implied assumption of a personal Spirit, capable of being 'grieved,' which is in this text, is in accordance with all the rest of the New Testament teaching.

What did Jesus Christ mean when He spoke of one who 'will guide you into all truth'; of one who 'whatsoever He shall hear, those things shall He speak'? What does the book of the Acts mean when it says that the Spirit said to the believers in Antioch, 'Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them'? What did Paul mean when he said, 'In every city the Holy Ghost testifieth that bonds and afflictions await me'? What does the minister officiating in baptism mean when he says, 'I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost'? That form presents,

according to many interpretations, a Divine Person, a Man, and an Influence. Why are these bracketed together? And what do we mean when, at the end of every Christian service, we invoke 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit'? A Man, and God, and an Influence—is that the interpretation? You cannot get rid from the New Testament teaching, whether you accept it or not—you cannot eliminate from it this, that the divine causality of our salvation is threefold and one, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

Now, brethren, I do not think I am exaggerating when I say that practically the average orthodox believer believes in a duality, and not a Trinity, in the divine nature. I do not care about the scholastic words, but what I would insist upon is that the course of Christian thinking has been roughly this. First of all, in the early Church, the question of the Divine nature came into play, mainly in reference to the relation of the Eternal Word to the Eternal Father, and of the Incarnation to both. And then, when that was roughly settled, there came down through many ages, and there still subsists, the endeavour to cast into complete and intelligible forms the doctrine, if I must use the word, of Christ's nature and work. And now, as I believe, to a very large extent, the foremost and best thinking of the Christian Church is being occupied with that last problem, the nature and work of that Divine Spirit. I believe that we stand on the verge of a far clearer perception of, and of a far more fervent and realising faith in, the Spirit of God, than ever the Churches have seen before. And I pray you to remember that however

much your Christian thought and Christian faith may be centred upon, and may be drawing its nourishment and its joy from, the work of Jesus Christ who died on the Cross for our salvation, and lives to be our King and Defender, there is a gap—not only in your Christian Creed, but also in your Christian experiences and joys and power, unless you have risen to this thought, that the Divine Spirit is not only an influence, a wind, a fire, an oil, a dove, a dew, but a Divine Person. We have to go back to the old creed—‘I believe in God the Father Almighty . . . and in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord . . . I believe in the Holy Ghost.’

But further, this same revelation carries with it another, and to some of us a startling thought. ‘Grieve not the Holy Spirit’: that Divine Person is capable of grief. I do not believe that is rhetorical exaggeration. Of course I know that we should think of God as the ever-blessed God, but we also in these last days begin to think more boldly, and I believe more truly, that if man is in the image of God, and there is a divine element in humanity, there must be a human element in divinity. And though I know that it is perilous to make affirmations about a matter so far beyond our possibility of verification by experience, I venture to think that perhaps the doctrine that God is lifted up high above all human weaknesses and emotions does not mean that there can be no shadow cast on the divine blessedness by the dark substance of human sin. I do not venture to assert: I only suggest; and this I know, that He who said to us, ‘He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father,’ had His eyes filled with tears, even in His hour of triumph, as He looked across the valley and saw the city spark-

ling in the rays of the morning sun. May we venture to see there an unveiling of the divine heart? Love has an infinite capacity of sorrow as of joy. But I leave these perhaps too presumptuous and lofty thoughts, to turn to the other points involved in the words before us.

I said, in the second place, there was—

II. A plain lesson here, as to the great purpose for which the Divine Spirit has been lodged in the heart of humanity.

I find that in the two words of my text, 'the Holy Spirit,' and 'ye were thereby sealed unto the day of redemption.' If the central characteristic which it imports us to know and to keep in mind is that implied by the name, 'the Holy Spirit,' then, of course, the great work that He has to perform upon earth is to make men like Himself. And that is further confirmed by the emblem of the seal which is here; for the seal comes in contact with the thing sealed, and leaves the impression of its own likeness there. And whatever else—and there is a great deal else that I cannot touch now—may be included in that great thought of the sealing by the Divine Spirit, these things are inseparably connected with, and suggested by it, viz. the actual contact of the Spirit of God with our spirits, which is expressed, as you may remember, in the other metaphors of being baptized in and anointed with, and yet more important, the result purposed by that contact being mainly to make us holy.

Now, I pray you to think of how different that is from all other notions of inspiration that the world has ever known, and how different it is from a great many ideas that have had influence within the Christian Church. People say there are not any miracles

now, and say we are worse off than when there used to be. That Divine Spirit does not come to give gifts of healing, interpretations of tongues, and all the other abnormal and temporary results which attended the first manifestations. These, when they were given, were but means to an end, and the end subsists whilst the means are swept away. It is better to be made good than to be filled with all manner of miraculous power. 'In this rejoice, not that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.' All the rest is transient. It is gone; let it go, we are not a bit the poorer for want of it. This remains—not tongues, nor gifts of healing, nor any other of these miraculous and extraordinary and external powers—but the continual operation of a divine influence, moulding men into its own likeness.

Christianity is intensely ethical, and it sets forth, as the ultimate result of all its machinery, changing men into the likeness of God. Holiness is that for which Christ died, that for which the Divine Spirit works. Unless we Christian people recognise the true perspective of the Spirit's gifts, and put at the base the extraordinary, and higher than these, but still subordinate, the intellectual, and on top of all the spiritual and moral, we do not understand the meaning of the central gift and possible blessing of Christianity, to make us holy, or, if you do not like the theological word, let us put it into still plainer and more modern English, to make you and me good men and women, like God. That is the mightiest work of that Divine Spirit.

We have here—

III. A plain warning as to the possibility of thwarting these influences.

Nothing here about irresistible grace ; nothing here about a power that lays hold upon a man, and makes him good, he lying passive in its hands like clay in the hands of the potter ! You will not be made holy without the Divine Spirit, but you will not be made holy without your working along with it. There is a possibility of resisting, and there is a possibility of co-operating. Man is left free. God does not lay hold of any one by the hair of his head, and drag him into paths of righteousness whether he will or no. But whilst there is the necessity for co-operation, which involves the possibility of resistance, we must also remember that that new life which comes into a man, and moulds his will as well as the rest of his nature, is itself the gift of God. We do not get into a contradiction when we thus speak, we only touch the edge of a great ocean in which our plummets can find no bottom. The same unravellable knot as to the co-operation of the divine and the creatural is found in the natural world, as in the experiences of the Christian soul. You have to work, and your work largely consists in yielding yourselves to the work of God upon you. 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you.' Brethren ! If you and I are Christian people, we have put into our hearts and spirits the talent. It depends on us whether we wrap it in a napkin, and stow it away underground somewhere, or whether we use it, and fructify and increase it. If you wrap it in a napkin and put it away underground, when you come to take it out, and want to say, 'Lo ! there Thou hast that is Thine,' you will find that it was not solid gold, which could not rust or diminish, but that it has been like some volatile essence, put away in an unventilated place, and im-

perfectly secured: the napkin is there, but the talent has vanished. We have to work with God, and we can resist. Ay, and there is a deeper and a sadder word than that applied by the same Apostle in another letter to the same subject. We can 'quench' the light and extinguish the fire.

What extinguishes it? Look at the catalogue of sins that lie side by side with this exhortation of my text! They are all small matters—bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, evil-speaking, malice, stealing, lying, and the like; very 'homely' transgressions, if I may so say. Yes, and if you pile enough of them upon the spark that is in your hearts you will smother it out. Sin, the wrenching of myself away from the influences, not attending to the whispers and suggestions, being blind to the teaching of the Spirit through the Word and through Providence: these are the things that 'grieve the Holy Spirit of God.'

And so, lastly, we have here—

IV. A Tender Motive, a dissuasive from sin, a persuasive to yielding and to righteousness.

Many a man has been kept from doing wrong things by thinking of a sad pale face sitting at home waiting for him. Many a boy has been kept from youthful transgressions which war against his soul here, on the streets of Manchester, full as they are of temptations, by thinking that it would grieve the poor old mother in her cottage, away down in the country somewhere. We can bring that same motive to bear, with infinitely increased force, in regard to our conduct as Christian people. 'Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God.' A father feels a pang if he sees that his child makes no account of some precious gift that he has bestowed upon him, and leaves it lying about

anywhere. A loving friend, standing on the margin of the stream, and calling to his friends in a boat when they are drifting to the rapids, turns away sad if they do not attend to his voice. That Divine Spirit pleads with us, and proffers its gifts to us, and turns away—I was going to use too strong a word, perhaps—sick at heart, not because of wounded authority, but because of wounded love and baffled desire to help, when we, in spite of It, will take our own way, neglect the call that warns us of our peril, and leave untouched the gifts that would have made us safe.

Dear brethren, surely such a dissuasive from evil, and such a persuasive to good, is mightier than all abstractions about duty and conscience and right, and the like. ‘Do it rightly,’ says Paul, ‘and you will please Him that hath called you’; leave the evil thing undone, ‘and my heart shall be glad, even mine.’ You and I can grieve the Christ whose Spirit is given to us. You and I can add something to ‘the joy of our Lord.’

GOD’S IMITATORS

‘Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children.’—EPH. v. 1.

THE Revised Version gives a more literal and more energetic rendering of this verse by reading, ‘Be ye, therefore, *imitators* of God, *as beloved* children.’ It is the only place in the Bible where that bold word ‘imitate’ is applied to the Christian relation to God. But, though the expression is unique, the idea underlies the whole teaching of the New Testament on the subject of Christian character and conduct. To be like God, and to set ourselves to resemble Him, is the sum of all duty; and in the measure in which we approxi-

mate thereto, we come to perfection. So, then, there are here just two points that I would briefly touch upon now—the one is the sublime precept of the text, and the other the all-sufficient motive enforcing it. ‘Be ye imitators of God as’—because you are, and know yourselves to be—‘beloved children,’ and it therefore behoves you to be like your Father.

I. First, then, this sublime precept.

Now notice that, broad as this precept is, and all-inclusive of every kind of excellence and duty as it may be, the Apostle has a very definite and specific meaning in it. There is one feature, and only one, in which, accurately speaking, a man may be like God. Our limited knowledge can never be like the ungrrowing perfect wisdom of God. Our holiness cannot be like His, for there are many points in our nature and character which have no relation or correspondence to anything in the divine nature. But what is left? Love is left. Our other graces are not like the God to whom they cleave. My faith is not like His faithfulness. My obedience is not like His authority. My submission is not like His autocratic power. My emptiness is not like His fulness. My aspirations are not like His gratifying of them. They correspond to God, but correspondence is not similarity; rather it presupposes unlikeness. Just as a concavity will fit into a convexity, for the very reason that it is concave and not convex, so the human unlikenesses, which are correspondent to God, are the characteristics by which it becomes possible that we should cleave to Him and inhere in Him. But whilst there is much in which He stands alone and incomparable, and whilst we have all to say, ‘Who is like unto Thee, O Lord?’ or what likeness shall we compare

unto Him? we yet can obey in reference to one thing,—and to one thing only, as it seems to me—the commandment of my text, ‘Be ye imitators of God.’ We can be *like* Him in nothing else, but our love not only corresponds to His, but is of the same quality and nature as His, howsoever different it may be in sweep and in fervour and in degree. The tiniest drop that hangs upon the tip of a thorn will be as perfect a sphere as the sun, and it will have its little rainbow on its round, with all the prismatic colours, the same in tint and order and loveliness, as when the bow spans the heavens. The dew-drop may imitate the sun, and we are to be imitators of God; knit to Him by the one thing in us which is kindred to Him in the deepest sense—the love that is the life of God and the perfecting of man.

Well, then, notice how the Apostle in the context fastens upon a certain characteristic of that divine love which we are to imitate in our lives; and thereby makes the precept a very practical and a very difficult one. Godlike love will be love that gives as liberally as His does. What is the very essence of all love? Longing to be like. And the purest and deepest love is love which desires to impart itself, and that is God’s love. The Bible seems to teach us that in a very mysterious sense, about which the less we say the less likely we are to err, there is a quality of giving up, as well as of giving, in God’s love; for we read of the Father that ‘spared not His Son,’ by which is meant, not that He did not shrink from inflicting something upon the Son, but that He did not grudgingly keep that Son for Himself. ‘He spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up to the death for us all.’ And if we can say but little about that surrender on the part of the infinite

Fountain of all love, we can say that Jesus Christ, who is the activity of the Father's love, spared not Himself, but, as the context puts it, 'gave Himself *up* for us.'

And that is the pattern for us. That thought is not a subject to be decorated with tawdry finery of eloquence, or to be dealt with as if it were a sentimental prettiness very fit to be spoken of, but impossible to be practised. It is the duty of every Christian man and woman, and they have not done their duty unless they have learned that the bond which unites them to men is, in its nature, the very same as the bond which unites men to God; and that they will not have lived righteously unless they learn to be 'imitators of God,' in the surrender of themselves for their brother's good.

Ah, friend, that grips us very tight—and if there were a little more reality and prose brought into our sentimental talk about Christian love, and that love were more often shown in action, in all the self-suppression and taking a lift of a world's burdens, which its great Pattern demands, the world would be less likely to curl a scornful lip at the Church's talk about brotherly love.

You say that you are a Christian—that is to say a child of God. Do you know anything, and would anybody looking at you see that you knew anything, about the love which counts no cost and no sacrifice too great to be lavished on the unworthy and the sinful?

But that brings me to another point. The Apostle here, in the context, not for the sake of saying pretty things, but for the sake of putting sharp points on Christian duty, emphasises another thought, that Godlike love will be a forgiving love. Why should we

be always waiting for the other man to determine our relations to him, and consider that if he does not like us we are absolved from the duty of loving him? Why should we leave him to settle the terms upon which we are to stand? God has love, as the Sermon on the Mount puts it, 'to the unthankful and the evil,' and we shall not be imitating His example unless we carry the same temper into all our relationships with our fellows.

People sit complacently and hear all that I am now trying to enforce, and think it is the right thing for me to say, but do you think it is the right thing for you to do? When a man obviously does not like you, or perhaps tries to harm you, what then? How do you meet him? 'He maketh His sun to shine, and sendeth His rain, on the unthankful and the evil.' 'Be ye imitators of God, as beloved children.'

Now note the all-sufficient motive for this great precept.

The sense of being loved will make loving, and nothing else will. The only power that will eradicate, or break without eradicating, our natural tendency to make ourselves our centres, is the recognition that there, at the heart, and on the central throne of the universe, and the divinest thing in it, there sits perfect and self-sacrificing Love, whose beams warm even us. The only flame that kindles love in a man's heart, whether it be to God or to man, is the recognition that he himself stands in the full sunshine of that blaze from above, and that God has loved him. Our hearts are like reverberating furnaces, and when the fire of the consciousness of the divine love is lit in them, then from sides and roof the genial heat is reflected back again to intensify the central flame.

Love begets love, and according to Paul, and according to John, and according to the Master of both of them, if a man loves God, then that glowing beam will glow whether it is turned to earth or turned to heaven.

The Bible does not cut love into two, and keep love to God in one division of the heart and love to man in another, but regards them as one and the same; the same sentiment, the same temper, the same attitude of heart and mind, only that in the one case the love soars, and in the other it lives along the level. The two are indissolubly tied together.

It is because a man knows himself to be beloved that therefore he is stimulated and encouraged to be an 'imitator of God,' and, on the other hand, the sense of being God's child underlies all real imitation of Him. Imitation is natural to the child. It is a miserable home where a boy does not imitate his father, and it is the father's fault in nine cases out of ten if he does not. Whoever feels himself to be a beloved child is thereby necessarily drawn to model himself on the Father that he loves, because he knows that the Father loves him.

So I come to the blessed truth that Christian morality does not say to us, 'Now begin, and work, and tinker away at yourselves, and try to get up some kind of excellence of character, and then come to God, and pray Him to accept you.' That is putting the cart before the horse. The order is reversed. We are to begin with taking our personal salvation and God's love to us for granted, and to work from that. Realise that you are beloved children, and then set to work to live accordingly. If we are ever to do what is our bounden duty to do, in all the various relations of

life, we must begin with recognising, with faithful and grateful hearts, the love wherewith God has loved us. We are to think much and confidently of ourselves as beloved of God, and that, and only that, will make us loving to men.

The Nile floods the fields of Egypt and brings greenness and abundance wherever its waters are carried, because thousands of miles away, close up to the Equator, the snows have melted and filled the water-courses in the far-off wilderness. And so, if we are to go out into life, living illustrations and messengers of a love that has redeemed even us, we must, in many a solitary moment, and in the depths of our quiet hearts, realise and keep fast the conviction that God hath loved us, and Christ hath died for us.

But a solemn consideration has to be pressed on all our consciences, and that is that there is something wrong with a man's Christian confidence whose assurance that he himself possesses a share in the love of God in Christ, is not ever moving him to imitation of the love in which he trusts. It is a shame that any one without Christian faith and love should be as charitable, as open to pity and to help, as earnest in any sort of philanthropic work, as Christian men and women are. But godless and perfectly secular philanthropy treads hard on the heels of Christian charity to-day. The more shame to us if we have been eating our morsels alone, and hugging ourselves in the possession of the love which has redeemed us; and if it has not quickened us to the necessity of copying it in our relations to our fellows. There is something dreadfully wrong about such a Christian character. 'He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how shall he love God whom he hath not seen?'

Take these plain principles, and honestly fit them to your characters and lives, and you will revolutionise both.

WHAT CHILDREN OF LIGHT SHOULD BE

‘Walk as children of light.’—EPH. v. 8.

It was our Lord who coined this great name for His disciples. Paul’s use of it is probably a reminiscence of the Master’s, and so is a hint of the existence of the same teachings as we now find in the existing Gospels, long before their day. Jesus Christ said, ‘Believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light’; and Paul gives substantially the same account of the way by which a man becomes a Son of the Light when he says, in the words preceding my text, ‘Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord.’

Union with Him makes light, just as the bit of carbon will glow as long as it is in contact with the electric force, and subsides again into darkness when that is switched off. To be in Christ is to be a child of light, and to believe in Christ is to be in Him.

But the intense moral earnestness of our Apostle is indicated by the fact that on both occasions in which he uses this designation he does so, not for the purpose of heightening the sense of the honour and prerogative attached to it, but for the sake of deducing from it plain and stringent moral duties, and heightening the sense of obligation to holy living.

‘Walk as children of light.’ Be true to your truest, deepest self. Manifest what you are. Let the sweet, sacred secrets of inward communion come out in the trivialities of ordinary conduct; make of your every thought a deed, and see to it that every deed be

vitalised and purified by its contact with the great truths and thoughts that lie in this name. These are various ways of putting this one all-sufficient directory of conduct.

Now, in the context, the Apostle expands this concentrated exhortation in three or four different directions, and perhaps we may best set forth its meaning if we shape our remarks by these. I venture to cast them, for the sake of emphasis, into a hortatory form.

I. Aim at an all-round productiveness of the natural fruits of the light.

The true reading is, 'Walk as children of light, for the fruit of the light' (not *spirit*, as the Authorised Version reads it) 'is in all goodness and righteousness and truth.' Now, it is obvious that the alteration of 'light' instead of 'spirit' brings the words into connection with the preceding and the following. The reference to the 'fruits of the spirit' would be entirely irrelevant in this place; a reference to the 'fruit of the light,' as being every form of goodness and righteousness and truth, is altogether in place.

There is, then, a natural tendency in the light to blossom out into all forms and types of goodness. 'Fruit' suggests the idea of natural, silent, spontaneous, effortless growth. And, although that is by no means a sufficient account of the process by which bad men become good men, it is an inseparable element, in all true moral renovation, that it be the natural outcome and manifestation of an inward principle; otherwise it is mere hypocritical adornment, or superficial appearance. If we are to do good we must first of all *be* good. If from us there are to come righteousness and truth, and all other graces of character, there must, first of all, be the radical change which is involved in passing from

separateness in the darkness to union with Jesus Christ in the light. The Apostle's theory of moral renovation is that you must begin with the implantation in the spirit of the source of all moral goodness—viz. Jesus Christ—brought into the heart by the uniting power of humble faith. And then there will be lodged in our being a vital power, of which the natural outcome will be all manner of fair and pure things. Effort is needed, as I shall have to say; but prior to effort there must be union with Jesus Christ.

This wide, general commandment of our text is sufficiently definite, thinks Paul; for if the light be in you it will naturally effloresce into all forms of beauty. Light is the condition of fruitfulness. Everywhere the vital germ is only acted upon by the light. No sunshine, no flowers; darkness produces thin, etiolated, whitened, and feeble shoots at the best. Let the light blaze in, and the blanched feebleness becomes vigorous and unfolds itself. How much more will light be the condition of fruitfulness when the very light itself is the seed from which all fruit is developed.

But, still further, mark how there must be an all-round completeness in order that we shall fairly set forth the glory and power of the light of which our faith makes us children and partakers. The fruit 'is in all goodness and righteousness and truth.' These three aspects—the good, the right, the true—may not be a scientific, ethical classification, but they give a sufficiently plain and practical distinction. Goodness, in which the prevailing idea is beneficence and the kindlier virtues; righteousness, which refers to the sterner graces of justice; truth, in which the prevalent idea is conformity in action with facts and the conditions of man's life and entire sincerity—these three

do cover, with sufficient completeness, the whole ground of possible human excellence. But the Apostle widens them still further by that little word *all*.

We all tend to cultivate those virtues which are in accordance with our natural dispositions, or are made most easy to us by our circumstances. And there is nothing in which we more need to seek comprehensiveness than in the effort to educate ourselves into, and to educe from ourselves, kinds of goodness and forms of excellence which are not naturally in accordance with our dispositions, or facilitated by our circumstances. The tree planted in the shrubbery will grow all lopsided; the bushes on the edge of the cliff will be shorn away on the windward side by the teeth of the south-western gale, and will lean over northwards, on the side of least resistance. And so we all are apt to content ourselves with doing the good things that are easiest for us, or that fit into our temperament and character. Jesus Christ would have us to be all-round men, and would that we should seek to aim after and possess the kinds of excellence that are least cognate to our characters. Are you strong, and do you pride yourself upon your firmness? Cultivate gentleness. Are you amiable, and pride yourself, perhaps, upon your sympathetic tenderness? Try to get a little iron and quinine into your constitution. Seek to be the man that you are least likely to be, and aim at a comprehensive development of '*all* righteousness and goodness and truth.'

Further, remember that this all-round completeness is not attained as the result of an effortless growth. True, these things are the fruits of the light, but also true, they are the prizes of struggle and the trophies of warfare. No man will ever attain to the compre-

hensive moral excellence which it is in his own power to win; no Christian will ever be as all-round a good man as he has the opportunities of being, unless he makes it his business, day by day, to aim after the conscious increase of gifts that he possesses, and the conscious appropriation and possession of those of which he is still lacking. 'Nothing of itself will come,' or very little. True, the light will shine out in variously tinted ray if it be in a man, as surely as from the seed come the blade and the ear and the full corn in the ear, but you will not have nor keep the light which thus will unfold itself unless you put forth appropriate effort. Christ comes into our hearts, but we have to bring Him there. Christ dwells in our hearts, but we have to work into our nature, and work out in action, the gifts that He bestows. They will advance but little in the divine life who trust to the natural unfolding of the supernatural life within them, and do not help its unfolding by their own resolute activity. 'Walk as children of the light.' There is your duty, for 'the fruit of the light is all righteousness.' One might have supposed that the commandments would be, 'Be passive as children of the light, for the light will grow.' But the Apostle binds together, as always, the two things, the divine working and the human effort at reception, retention, and application of that divine work, just as he does in the great classical passage, 'Work out your own salvation, for it is God that worketh in you.'

II. Secondly, the general exhortation of my text widens out itself into this—test all things by Christ's approval of them.

'Proving what is well pleasing unto the Lord.' That, according to the natural construction of the Greek, is

the main way by which the Apostle conceives that his general commandment of 'walking as children of the light' is to be carried out. You do it if, step by step, and moment by moment, and to every action of life, you apply this standard—Does Christ like it? Does it please Him? When that test is rigidly applied, then, and only then, will you walk as becomes the children of the light.

So, then, there is a standard—not what men approve, not what my conscience, partially illuminated, may say is permissible, not what is recognised as allowable by the common maxims of the world round about us, but Christ's approval. How different the hard, stern, and often unwelcome prescriptions of law and rigidity of some standards of right become when they are changed into that which pleases the Divine Lord and Lover! Surely it is something blessed that the hard, cold, and to such a large extent powerless conceptions of duty or obligation shall be changed into pleasing Jesus Christ; and that so our hearts shall be enlisted in the service of our consciences, and love shall be glad to do the Beloved's will. There are many ways by which the burden of life's obligations is lightened to the Christian. I do not know that any of them is more precious than the fact that law is changed into His will, and that we seek to do what is right because it pleases the Master. There is the standard.

It will be easy for us to come to the right appreciation of individual actions when we are living in the light. Union with Jesus Christ will make us quick to discern His will. We have a conscience;—well, that needs educating and enlightening, and very often correcting. We have the Word of God;—well, that needs explanation, and needs to be brought close to

our hearts. If we have Christ dwelling in us, in the measure in which we are in sympathy with Him, we shall be gifted with clear eyes, not indeed to discern the expedient—that belongs to another region altogether—but we shall be gifted with very clear eyes to discern right from wrong, and there will be an instinctive recoil from the evil, and an instinctive attachment of ourselves to the good. If we are in the Lord we shall easily be able to prove what is acceptable and well-pleasing to Him.

We shall never walk as the children of the light, unless we have the habit of referring everything, trifles and great things, to His arbitrament, and seeking in them all to do what is pleasing in His sight. The smallest deed may be brought under the operation of the largest principles. Gravitation influences the microscopic grain of sand as well as planets and sun. There is nothing so small but you can bring it into this category—it either pleases or displeases Jesus Christ. And the faults into which Christian men fall and in which they continue are very largely owing to their carelessness in applying this standard to the small things of their daily lives. The sleepy Custom House officers let the contraband article in because it seems to be of small bulk. There are old stories about how strong castles were taken by armed men hidden in an innocent-looking cart of forage. Do you keep up a rigid inspection at the frontier, and see to it that everything vindicates its right to enter because it is pleasing to Jesus Christ.

III. Thirdly, we have here another expansion of the general command, and that is—keep well separate from the darkness.

Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of

darkness, but rather reprove them.' Now, your time will not allow me to dwell, as I had hoped to do, upon the considerations to be suggested here. The very briefest possible mention of them is all that I can afford.

'The unfruitful works of darkness';—well, then, the darkness has its works, but though they be works they are not worth calling fruit. That is to say, nothing except the conduct which flows from union with Jesus Christ so corresponds to the man's nature and relations, or has any such permanence about it as to entitle it to be called fruit. Other acts may be 'works,' but Paul will not dishonour the great word 'fruit' by applying it to such rubbish as these, and so he brands them as 'unfruitful works of darkness.'

Keep well clear of them, says the Apostle. He is not talking here about the relations between Christians and others, but about the relations between Christian men and the *works* of darkness. Only, of course, in order to avoid fellowship with the works you will sometimes have to keep yourselves well separate from their doers. Much association with such men is forced upon us by circumstances, and much is the imperative duty of Christian beneficence and charity. But I venture to express the strong and growing conviction that there are few exhortations that the secularised Church of this generation needs more than this commandment of my text: 'Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.' 'What communion hath light with darkness?' Ah! we see plenty of it, unnatural as it is, in the so-called Church of to-day. 'What concord hath Christ with Belial? What part hath he that believeth with an infidel? Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate.'

And, brethren, remember, a part of the separation is that your light shall be a constant condemnation of the darkness. 'But rather reprove them,' says my text; that is a work that devolves upon all Christians. It is to be done, no doubt, by the silent condemnation of evil which ever comes from the quiet doing of good. As an old preacher has it, 'The presence of a saint hinders the devil of elbow-room for doing his tricks.' The old legend told us that the fire-darting Apollo shot his radiant arrows against the pythons and 'dragons of the slime.' The sons of light have the same office—by their light of life to make the darkness aware of itself, and ashamed of itself; and to change it into light.

But silent reproving is not all our duty. The Christian Church has wofully fallen beneath its duty, not only in regard to its complicity with the social crimes of each generation, but in regard to its cowardly silence towards them; especially when they flaunt and boast themselves in high places. What has the Church said worthy of itself in regard to war? What has the Church said worthy of itself in regard to impurity? What has the Church said worthy of itself in regard to drunkenness? What has the Church said worthy of itself in regard to the social vices that are honey-combing society and this city to-day? If you are the sons of light, walk as the sons of light, and have 'no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness'; but set the trumpet to your lips, and 'declare unto My people their transgressions, and to the house of Israel their sin.'

THE FRUIT OF THE LIGHT

'The fruit of the light is in all goodness and righteousness and truth.'—
EPH. v. 9 (R.V.)

THIS is one of the cases in which the Revised Version has done service by giving currency to an unmistakably accurate and improved reading. That which stands in our Authorised Version, 'the fruit of the Spirit,' seems to have been a correction made by some one who took offence at the violent metaphor, as he conceived it, that 'light' should bear 'fruit,' and desired to tinker the text so as to bring it into verbal correspondence with another passage in the Epistle to the Galatians, where 'the fruits of the Spirit' are enumerated. But the reading, 'the fruit of the *light*,' has not only the preponderance of manuscript authority in its favour, but is preferable because it preserves a striking image, and is in harmony with the whole context.

The Apostle has just been exhorting his Ephesian friends to walk as 'children of the light,' and before he goes on to expand and explain that injunction he interjects this parenthetical remark, as if he would say, To be true to the light that is in you is the sum of duty, and the condition of perfectness, '*for the fruit of the light is in all goodness and righteousness and truth.*' That connection is entirely destroyed by the substitution of 'spirit.' The whole context, both before and after my text, is full of references to the light as working in the life; and a couple of verses after it we read about 'the unfruitful works of darkness,' an expression which evidently looks back to my text.

So please to understand that our text in this sermon

is—‘The fruit of the *light* consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth.’

I. Now, first of all, I have just a word to say about this light which is fruitful.

Note—for it is, I think, not without significance—a minute variation in the Apostle’s language in this verse and in the context. He has been speaking of ‘light,’ now he speaks of ‘*the light*’; and that, I think, is not accidental. The expression, ‘walk as children of light,’ is more general and vague. The expression, ‘the fruit of *the light*,’ points to some specific source from which all light flows. And observe, also, that we have in the previous context, ‘Ye were sometime darkness, but now are ye light *in the Lord*,’ which evidently implies that the light of which my text speaks is not natural to men, but is the result of the entrance into their darkness of a new element.

Now I do not suppose that we should be entitled to say that Paul here is formally anticipating the deep teaching of the Apostle John that Jesus Christ is ‘*the Light of men*,’ and especially of Christian men. But he is distinctly asserting, I think, that the light which blesses and hallows humanity is no diffused glow, but is all gathered and concentrated into one blazing centre, from which it floods the hearts of men. Or, to put away the metaphor, he is here asserting that the only way by which any man can cease to be, in the doleful depths of his nature, darkness in its saddest sense is by opening his heart through faith, that into it there may rush, as the light ever does where an opening—be it only a single tiny cranny—is made, the light which is Christ, and without whom is darkness.

I know, of course, that, apart altogether from the

exercise of faith in Jesus Christ, there do shine in men's hearts rays of the light of knowledge and of purity; but if we believe the teaching of Scripture, these, too, are from Christ, in His universally-diffused work, by which, apart altogether from individual faith, or from a knowledge of revelation, He is 'the light that lighteth every man coming into the world.' And I hold that, wheresoever there is conscience, wheresoever there is judgment and reason, wheresoever there are sensitive desires after excellence and nobleness, *there* is a flickering of a light which I believe to be from Christ Himself. But that light, as widely diffused as humanity, fights with, and is immersed in, darkness. In the physical world, light and darkness are mutually exclusive: where the one is the other comes not; but in the spiritual world the paradox is true that the two co-exist. Apart from revelation and the acceptance of Jesus Christ's person and work by our humble faith, the light struggles with the darkness, and the darkness obstinately refuses to admit its entrance, and 'comprehendeth it not.' And so, ineffectual but to make restless and to urge to vain efforts and to lay up material for righteous judgment, is the light that shines in men whose hearts are shut against Christ. The fruitful light is Christ within us, and, unless we know and possess it by the opening of heart and mind and will, the solemn words preceding my text are true of us: 'Ye were sometime darkness.' Oh, brother! do you see to it that the subsequent words are true of you: 'Now are ye light in the Lord.' Only if you are in Christ are you truly light.

II. Now, secondly, notice the fruitfulness of this indwelling-light.

Of course the metaphor that light, like a tree, grows and blossoms and puts forth fruit, is a very strong one. And its very violence and incongruity help its force. Fruit is generally used in Scripture in a good sense. It conveys the notion of something which is the natural outcome of a vital power, and so, when we talk about the light being fruitful, we are setting, in a striking image, the great Christian thought that, if you want to get right conduct, you must have renewed character; and that if you have renewed character you will get right conduct. This is the principle of my text. The light has in it a productive power; and the true way to adorn a life with all things beautiful, solemn, lovely, is to open the heart to the entrance of Jesus Christ.

God's way is—first, new life, then better conduct. Men's way is, 'cultivate morality, seek after purity, try to be good.' And surely conscience and experience alike tell us that that is a hopeless effort. To begin with what should be second is an anachronism in morals, and will be sure to result in failure in practice. He is not a wise man that tries to build a house from the chimneys downwards. And to talk about making a man's doings good before you have secured a radical change in the doer, by the infusion into him of the very life of Jesus Christ Himself, is to begin at the top story, instead of at the foundation. Many of us are trying to put the cart before the horse in that fashion. Many of us have made the attempt over and over again, and the attempt always has failed and always will fail. You may do much for the mending of your characters and for the incorporation in your lives of virtues and graces which do not grow there naturally and without effort. I do not want

to cut the nerves of any man's strugglings, I do not want to darken the brightness of any man's aspirations, but I do say that the people who, apart from Jesus Christ, and the entrance into their souls by faith of His quickening power, are seeking, some of them nobly, some of them sadly, and all of them vainly, to cure their faults of character, will never attain anything but a superficial and fragmentary goodness, because they have begun at the wrong end.

But 'make the tree good,' and its fruit will be good. Get Christ into your heart, and all fair things will grow as the natural outcome of His indwelling. The fruitfulness of the light is not put upon its right basis until we come to understand that the light is Christ Himself, who, dwelling in our hearts by faith, is made *in* us as well as '*unto* us wisdom, and righteousness, and salvation, and redemption.' The beam that is reflected from the mirror is the very beam that falls on the mirror, and the fair things in life and conduct which Christian people bring forth are in very deed the outcome of the vital power of Jesus Christ which has entered into them. 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me,' is the Apostle's declaration in the midst of his struggles; and the perfected saints before the throne cast their crowns at His feet, and say, 'Not unto us! not unto us, but unto Thy name be the glory.' The talent is the Lord's, only the spending of it is the servant's. And so the order of the Divine appointment is, first, the entrance of the light, and then the conduct that flows from it.

Note, too, how this same principle of the fruitfulness of the light gives instruction as to the true place of effort in the Christian life. The main effort ought

to be to get more of the light into ourselves. 'Abide in Me, and I in you.' And so, and only so, will fruit come.

And such an effort has to take in hand all the circumference of our being, and to fix thoughts that wander, and to still wishes that clamour, and to empty hearts that are full of earthly loves, and to clear a space in minds that are crammed with thoughts about the transient and the near, in order that the mind may keep in steadfast contemplation of Jesus, and the heart may be bound to Him by cords of love that are not capable of being snapped, and scarcely of being stretched, and the will may in patience stand saying, 'Speak, Lord! for Thy servant heareth'; and the whole tremulous nature may be rooted and built up in and on Him. Ah, brother! if we understand all that goes to the fulfilment of that one sweet and merciful injunction, 'Abide in Me,' we shall recognise that there is the field on which Christian effort is mainly to be occupied.

But that is not all. For there must be likewise the effort to appropriate, and still more to manifest in conduct, the fruit-bringing properties of that indwelling light. 'Giving all diligence add to your faith.' 'Having these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord.' We are often told that just as we trust Christ for our forgiveness and acceptance, so we are to trust Him for our sanctifying and perfecting. It is true, and yet it is not true. We are to trust Him for our sanctifying and our perfecting. But the faith which trusts Him for these is not a substitute for effort, but it is the foundation of effort. And the more we rely on His power to cleanse us from all evil,

the more are we bound to make the effort in His power and in dependence on Him, to cleanse ourselves from all evil, and to secure as our own the natural outcomes of His dwelling within us, which are 'the fruits of the light.'

III. And so, lastly, notice the specific fruits which the Apostle here dwells upon.

They consist, says he, in all goodness and righteousness and truth. Now 'goodness' here seems to me to be used in its narrower sense, just as the same Apostle uses it in the Epistle to the Romans, in contrast with 'righteousness,' where he says, 'for a good man some would even dare to die.' There he means by 'good,' as he does here by 'goodness,' not the general expression for all forms of virtue and gracious conduct, but the specific excellence of kindness, amiability, or the like. 'Righteousness,' again, is that which rigidly adheres to the strict law of duty, and carefully desires to give to every man what belongs to him, and to every relation of life what it requires. And 'truth' is rather the truth of sincerity, as opposed to hypocrisy and lies and shams, than the intellectual truth as opposed to error.

Now, all these three types of excellence—kindness, righteousness, truthfulness—are apt to be separated. For the first of them—amiability, kindness, gentleness—is apt to become too soft, to lose its grip of righteousness, and it needs the tonic of the addition of those other graces, just as you need lime in water if it is to make bone. Righteousness, on the other hand, is apt to become stern, and needs the softening of goodness to make it human and attractive. The rock is grim when it is bare; it wants verdure to drape it if it is to be lovely. Truth needs kindness

and righteousness, and they need truth. For there are men who pride themselves on 'speaking out,' and take rudeness and want of regard for other people's sensitive feelings to be sincerity. And, on the other hand, it is possible that amiability may be sweeter than truth is, and that righteousness may be hypocritical and insincere. So Paul says, 'Let this white light be resolved in the prism of your characters into the three-fold rays of kindness, righteousness, truthfulness.'

And then, again, he desires that each of us should try to make our own a fully developed, all-round perfection—all goodness and righteousness and truth; of every sort, that is, and in every degree. We are all apt to cultivate graces of character which correspond to our natural disposition and make. We are all apt to become *torsos*, fragmentary, one-sided, like the trees that grow against a brick wall, or those which stand exposed to the prevailing blasts from one quarter of the sky. But we should seek to appropriate types of excellence to which we are least inclined, as well as those which are most in harmony with our natural dispositions. If you incline to kindness, try to brace yourselves with righteousness; if you incline to righteousness, to take the stern, strict view of duty, and to give to every man what he deserves, remember that you do not give men their dues unless you give them a great deal more than their deserts, and that righteousness does not perfectly allot to our fellows what they ought to receive from us, unless we give them pity and indulgence and forbearance and forgiveness when it is needed. The one light breaks into all colours—green in the grass, purple and red in the flowers, flame-coloured in the morning sky, blue in the deep sea. The light that is

in us ought, in like manner, to be analysed into, and manifested in, 'whatsoever things are lovely and of good report.'

And so, dear friends, here is a test for us all. Devout emotion, orthodox creed, practical diligence in certain forms of benevolence and philanthropic work, are all very well; but Jesus Christ came to make us like Himself, and to turn our darkness into light that betrays its source by its resemblance, though it be a weakened one, to the sun from which it came. We have no right to call ourselves Christ's followers unless we are, in some measure, Christ's pictures.

Here is a message of cheer and hope for us all. We have all tried, and tried, and tried, over and over again, to purge and mend these poor characters of ours. How long the toil, how miserable and poor the results! A million candles will not light the night; but when God's mercy of sunrise comes above the hills, beasts of prey slink to their dens and birds begin to sing, and flowers open, and growth resumes again. We cannot mend ourselves except partially and superficially; but we can open will, heart, and mind, by faith, for His entrance; and where He comes, there He slays the evil creatures that live in and love the dark, and all gracious things will blossom into beauty. If we are in the Lord we shall be light; and if the Lord, who is the Light, is in us, we, too, shall bear fruits of 'all righteousness and goodness and truth.'

PLEASING CHRIST

‘Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.’—EPH. v. 10.

THESE words are closely connected with those which precede them in the 8th verse—‘Walk as children of light.’ They further explain the mode by which that commandment is to be fulfilled. They who, as children of light, mindful of their obligations and penetrated by its brightness, seek to conform their active life to the light to which they belong, are to do so by making experiment of, or investigating and determining, what is ‘acceptable to the Lord.’ It is the sum of all Christian duty, a brief compendium of conduct, an all-sufficient directory of life.

There need only be two remarks made by way of explanation of my text. One is that the expression rendered ‘acceptable’ is more accurately and forcibly given, as in the Revised Version, by the plainer word ‘well-pleasing.’ And the other is that ‘the Lord’ here, as always in the New Testament—unless the context distinctly forbids it—means Jesus Christ. Here the context distinctly demands it. For only a sentence or two before, the Apostle has been speaking about ‘those who were sometime darkness having been made light in the Lord’—which is obviously in Jesus Christ.

And here, therefore, what pleases *Christ* is the Christian’s highest duty, and the one prescription which is required to be obeyed in order to walk in the light is, to do that which pleases Him.

I. So, then, in these brief words, so comprehensive, and going so deep into the secrets of holy and noble living, I want you to notice that we have, first, the only attitude which corresponds to our relations to Christ.

How remarkable it is that this Apostle should go on the presumption that our conduct affects Him, that it is possible for us to please, or to displease Jesus Christ now. We often wonder whether the beloved dead are cognisant of what we do; and whether any emotions of something like either our earthly complacency or displeasure, can pass across the undisturbed calm of their hearts, if they are aware of what their loved ones here are doing. That question has to be left very much in the dark, however our hearts may sometimes seek to enforce answers. But this we know, that that loving Lord, not merely by the omniscience of His divinity, but by the perpetual knowledge and sympathy of His perfect manhood, is not only cognizant of, but is affected by, the conduct of His professed followers here on earth. And since it is true that He now is not swept away into some oblivious region where the dead are, but is close beside us all, cognizant of every act, watching every thought, and capable of having something like a shadow of a pang passing across the Divine depth of His eternal joy and repose at the right hand of God, then, surely, the only thing that corresponds to such a relationship as at present subsists between the Christian soul and the Lord is that we should take as our supreme and continual aim that, 'whether present or absent, we should be well-pleasing to Him.' Nor does that demand rest only upon the realities of our present relation to that Lord, but it goes back to the past facts on which our present relation rests. And the only fitting response to what He has been and done for us is that we should, each of us, in the depth of our hearts, and in the widest circumference of the surface of our lives, enthrone Him as absolute Lord, and take His good pleasure as our supreme law. Jesus Christ is

King because He is Redeemer. The only adequate response to what He has done for me is that I should absolutely submit myself to Him, and say to Him, 'O Lord! truly I am Thy servant! Thou hast loosed my bonds.' The one fitting return to make for that Cross and Passion is to enthrone His will upon my will, and to set Him as absolute Monarch over the whole of my nature. Thoughts, affections, purposes, efforts, and all should crown Him King, because He has died for me. The conduct which corresponds to the relations which we bear to Christ as the present Judge of our work, and the Redeemer of our souls by His mighty deed in the past, is this of my text, to make my one law His will, and to please Him that hath called me to be His soldier.

The meaning of being a Christian is that, in return for the gift of a whole Christ, I give my whole self to Him. 'Why call ye me Lord! Lord! and do not the things which I say?' If He is what He assuredly is to every one of us, nothing can be plainer than that we are thereby bound by obligations which are not iron, but are more binding than if they were, because they were woven out of the cords of love and the bands of a man, bound to serve Him supremely, Him only, Him always, Him by the suppression of self, and the making His pleasure our law.

II. Now, secondly, let me ask you to notice that we have here the all-sufficient guide for practical life.

It sounds very mystical, and a trifle vague, to say, Do everything to please Jesus Christ. It is all-comprehensive; it is mystical in the sense that it goes down below the mere surface of prescriptions about conduct. But it is not vague, and it is capable of immediate application to every part, and to every act, of every man's life.

For what is it that pleases Jesus Christ? His own likeness; as, according to the old figure—which is, I suppose, true to spiritual facts, whether to external facts or not—the refiner knows that the metal is ready to flow when he can see his own face in it. Jesus Christ desires most that we should all be like Him. That we are to bear His image is as comprehensive, and at the same time as specific, a way of setting forth the sum of Christian duty, as are the words of my text. The two phrases mean the same thing.

And what is the likeness to Jesus Christ which it is thus our supreme obligation and our truest wisdom and perfection to bear? Well! we can put it all into two words—self-suppression and continual consciousness of obedience to the Divine will. The life of Jesus Christ, in its brief records in Scripture, is felt by every thoughtful man to contain within its narrow compass adequate direction for, and to set forth the ideal of, human life. That is not because He went through all varieties of earthly experience, for He did not. The life of a Jewish peasant nineteen centuries ago was extremely unlike the life of a Manchester merchant, of a college professor, of a successful barrister, of a struggling mother, in this present day. But in the narrow compass of that life there are set forth these two things, which are the basis of all human perfection—the absolute annihilation of self-regard, and the perpetual recognition of a Divine will. These are the things which every Christian man and woman is bound by the power of Christ's Cross to translate into the actions correspondent with their particular circumstances. And so the student at his desk and the sailor on his deck, the miner in his pit, the merchant on 'Change, the worker in various handicrafts, may each

be sure that they are doing what is pleasing to Christ if, in their widely different ways, they seek to do what they can do in all the varieties of life—crucify self, and commune with God.

That is not easy. Whatever may be the objections to be brought against this summary of Christian duty, the objection that it is vague is the last that can be sustained. Try it, and you will find out that it is anything but vague. It will grip tight enough, depend upon it. It will go deep enough down into all the complexities of our varying circumstances. If it has a fault (which it has not) it is in the direction of too great stringency for unaided human nature. But the stringency is not too great when we depend upon Him to help us, and an impossible ideal is a certain prophet of its own fulfilment some day.

So, brethren, here is the sufficient guide, not because it cumbers us with a mass of wretched little prescriptions such as a martinet might give, about all sorts of details of conduct. That is left to profitless casuists like the ancient rabbis. But the broad principles will effloresce into all manner of perfectnesses and all fruits. He that has in his heart these thoughts, that the definition of virtue is pleasing Jesus Christ, that the concrete form of goodness is likeness to Him, and that the elements of likeness to Him are these two, that I should never think about myself, and always think about God, needs no other guide or instructor to fill his life with 'whatsoever things are lovely and of good report,' and to make his own all that the world calls virtue, and all which the consciences of good men have conspired to praise.

But not only does this guide prove its sufficiency by reason of its comprehensiveness, but also because there

is no difficulty in ascertaining what at each moment it prescribes. Of course, I know that such a precept as this cannot contain in itself guidance in matters of mere practical expediency. But, apart from these—which are to be determined by the ordinary exercise of prudence and common sense—in regard to the right and the wrong of our actions, I believe that if a man wants to know Christ's will, and takes the way of knowing it which Christ has appointed, he shall not be left in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

For love has a strange power of divining love's wishes, as we all know, and as many a sweetness in the hearts and lives of many of us has shown us. If we cherish sympathy with Jesus Christ we shall look on things as He looks on them, and we shall not be left without the knowledge of what His pleasure is. If we keep near enough to Him the glance of His eye will do for guidance, as the old psalm has it. They are rough animal natures that do not understand how to go, unless their instructors be the crack of the whip or the tug of the bridle. 'I will guide thee with Mine eye.' A glance is enough where there are mutual understanding and love. Two musical instruments in adjoining rooms, tuned to the same pitch, have a singular affinity, and if a note be struck on the one the other will vibrate to the sound. And so hearts here that love Jesus Christ and keep in unison with Him, and are sympathetic with His desires, will learn to know His will, and will re-echo the music that comes from Him. And if our supreme desire is to know what pleases Jesus Christ, depend upon it the desire will not be in vain. 'If any man wills to do His will he shall know of the doctrine.' Ninety per cent. of all our perplexities as to conduct come from our not having a pure and simple wish to

do what is right in His sight, clearly supreme above all others. When we have that wish it is never left unsatisfied.

And even if sometimes we do make a mistake as to what is Christ's pleasure, if our supreme wish and honest aim in the mistake have been to do His pleasure, we may be sure that He will be pleased with the deed. Even though its body is not that which He willed us to do, its spirit is that which He does desire. And if we do a wrong thing, a thing in itself displeasing to Him, whilst all the while we desired to please Him, we shall please Him in the deed which would otherwise have displeased Him. And so two Christian men, for instance, who take opposite sides in a controversy, may both of them be doing what is well-pleasing in His sight, whilst they are contradicting one another, if they are doing it for His sake. And it is possible that the inquisitor and his victim may both have been serving Christ. At all events, let us be sure of this, that whenever we desire to please Him, He will help us to do it, and ordinarily will help us by making clear to us the path on which His smile rests.

III. Again, notice that we have here an all-powerful motive for Christian life.

The one thing which all other summaries of duty lack is motive power to get themselves carried into practice. But we all know, from our own happy human experience, that no motive which can be brought to bear upon men is stronger, when there are loving hearts concerned, than this simple one, 'Do it to please me.' And that is what Jesus Christ really says. That is no piece of mere sentiment, brethren, nor of mere pulpit rhetoric. That is the deepest thought of Christian morality, and is the distinctive peculiarity which

gives the morality of the New Testament its clear supremacy over all other. There are precepts in it far nobler and loftier than can be found elsewhere. The perspective of virtues and graces in it is different from that which ordinarily prevails amongst men. But I do not think that it is in the details of its precepts so much as in the communication of power to obey them, and in the suggestion of the motive which makes them all easy, that the difference of Christ's ethics from all the teaching of the world beside is most truly to be found.

And here lies the excellence thereof. It is a poor, cold thing to say to a man, 'Do this because it is right.' It is a still more powerless thing to say to him, 'Do this because it is expedient.' 'Do this because, in the long run, it leads to happiness.' It is all different when you say, 'Do this to please Jesus Christ, to please that Christ who pleased not Himself but gave Himself for you.' That is the fire that melts the ore. That is the heat that makes flexible the hard, stiff material. That is the motive which makes duty delight, which makes 'the rough places plain' and 'the crooked things straight.' It does not abolish natural tastes, it does not supersede natural disinclinations, but it does smooth and soften unwelcome and hard tasks, and it invests service with a halo of glory, and changes the coldness of duty into rosy light; as when the sunrise strikes on the peaks of the frozen mountains. The one motive which impels men, and can be trusted to secure in them whatsoever things are noble, is to please Him.

So we have the secret of blessedness in these words. For self-submission and suppression are blessedness. Our miseries come from our unbridled wills, far more than from our sensitive organisations. It is because

we do not accept providences that providences hurt. It is because we do not accept the commandments that the commandments are burdensome. Those who have no will, except as it is vitalised by God's will, have found the secret of blessedness, and have entered into rest. In the measure in which we approximate to that condition, our wills will be strengthened as well as our hearts set at ease.

And blessedness comes, too, because the approbation of the Master, which is the aim of the servant, is reflected in the satisfaction of an approving conscience, which points onwards to the time when the Master's approval shall be revealed in the servant's glory.

I was reading the other day about a religious reformer who arose in Eastern lands a few years since, and gathered many disciples. He and his principal follower were seized and about to be martyred. They were suspended by cords from a gibbet, to be fired at by a platoon of soldiers. And as they hung there, the disciple turned to his teacher, and as his last word on earth said, 'Master! are you satisfied with me?' His answer was a silent smile; and the next minute a bullet was in his heart. Dear brethren, do you turn to Jesus Christ with the same question, 'Master! art Thou satisfied with me?' and you will get His smile here; and hereafter, 'Well done, good and faithful servant.'

UNFRUITFUL WORKS OF DARKNESS

'And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.'—Eph. v. 11.

WE have seen in a former sermon that 'the fruit,' or outcome, 'of the Light' is a comprehensive perfection,

consisting in all sorts and degrees of goodness and righteousness and truth. Therefore, the commandment, 'Walk as children of the light,' sums up all Christian morality. Is there need, then, for any additional precept? Yes; for Christian people do not live in an empty world. If there were no evil round them, and no proclivity to evil within them, it would be amply sufficient to say to them, 'Be true to the light which you behold.' But since both these things are, the commandment of my text is further necessary. We do not work *in vacuo*, and therefore friction and atmosphere have to be taken account of; and an essential part of 'walking as children of the light' is to know how to behave ourselves when confronted with 'the works of darkness.'

These Ephesian Christians lived in a state of society honeycombed with hideous immorality, the centre of which was the temple, which was their city's glory and shame. It was all but impossible for them to have nothing to do with the works of evil, unless, indeed, they went out of the world. But the difficulty of obedience does not affect the duty of obedience, nor slacken in the smallest degree the stringency of a command. This obligation lies upon us as fully as it did upon them, and the discharge of it by professing Christians would bring new life to moribund churches.

I. Let me ask you to note with me, first, the fruitlessness inherent in all the works of darkness.

You may remember that I pointed out, in a former discourse on the context, that the Apostle, here and elsewhere, draws a very significant distinction between 'works' and 'fruit,' and that distinction is put very strikingly in the words of my text. There are works which are barren. It is a grim thought that there

may be abundant activity which, in the eyes of God, comes to just nothing; and that pages and pages of laborious calculations, when all summed up, have for result a great round O. Men are busy, and hosts of them are doing what the old fairy stories tell us that evil spirits were condemned to do—spinning ropes out of sea-sand; and their life-work is nought when they come to reckon it up.

I have no time to dwell upon this thought, but I wish, just for a moment or two, to illustrate it.

All godless life is fruitless, inasmuch as it has no permanent results. Permanent results of a sort, indeed, follow everything that men do, for all our actions tend to make character, and they all have a share in fixing that which depends upon character—viz. destiny, both here and yonder. And thus the most fleeting of our deeds, which in one aspect is as transitory as the snow upon the great plains when the sun rises, leaves everlasting traces upon ourselves and upon our condition. But yet acts concerned with transitory things may have permanent fruit, or may be as transient as the things with which they are concerned. And the difference depends on the spirit in which they are done. If the roots are only in the surface-skin of soil, when that is pared off the plant goes. A life that is to be eternal must strike its roots through all the superficial *humus* down to the very heart of things. When its roots twine themselves round God then the deeds which blossom from them will blossom unfading for ever.

Think of men going empty-handed into another world, and saying, ‘O Lord! I made a big fortune in Manchester when I lived there, and I left it all behind me’; or, ‘I mastered a science, and one gleam of the

light of eternity has antiquated it'; or, 'I gained prizes, won my aims, and they have all dropped from my hands, and here I stand, having to say in the most tragic sense: Nothing in my hands I bring.' And another man dies in the Lord, and his 'works do follow' him. It is not every vintage that bears exportation. Some wines are mellowed by crossing the ocean; some are turned into vinegar. The works of darkness are unfruitful because they are transient.

And they are unfruitful because, whilst they last, they yield no real satisfaction. The Apostle could say to another Church with a certainty as to what the answer would be, 'What fruit had ye *then*'—when ye were doing them—'in the things whereof ye are now ashamed?' And the answer is 'None!' Of course, it is true that men do bad things because they like them better than good. Of course, it is true that the misery of mankind is that they have no appetite in the general for the only real satisfaction. But it is also true that no man who feeds his heart and mind on anything short of God is really at rest in anything that he does or possesses. Occasional twinges of conscience, dim perceptions that after all they are walking in a vain show; glimpses of nobler possibilities, a vague unrest, an unwillingness to reflect and look the facts of their condition in the face, like men that will not take stock because they half suspect that they are insolvent—these are the conditions that attach to all godless men's lives. There is no real fruit for their thirsty lips to feed upon. The smallest man is too large to be satisfied with anything short of Infinity. The human heart is like some narrow opening on a hill-side, so narrow that it looks as if a glassful of water would fill it. But it goes away down, down,

down into the depths of the mountain, and you may pour in hogsheads and no effect is visible. God, and God alone, brings to the thirsty heart the fruit that it needs.

Another solemn thought illustrates the unfruitfulness of a godless life. There is no correspondence between what such a man does and what he is intended to do. Think of what the most degraded and sensuous wretch that shambles about the slums of a city, sodden with beer and rotten with profligacy, could be. Think of the raptures of devout contemplation and the energies of holy work which are possible for that soul, and then say—though it is an extreme case, the principle holds in less extreme cases—Are these things that men do apart from God, however shining, noble, illustrious they may be in the eyes of the world, and trumpeted forth by the mouthpieces of popular opinion, are these things worth calling fruits fit to be borne by such a tree? No more than the cankers on a rose-bush or the galls on an oak-tree are worthy of being called fruit are these works that some of you have as the only products of a life's activity. 'Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?'

II. And now, secondly, notice the plain Christian duty of abstinence.

'Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.' Now, the text, as it stands in our version, seems to suggest that these dark works are personified as companions whom a good man ought to avoid; and that, therefore, the bearing of the exhortation is, 'Have nothing to do, in your own individual lives, with evil things that one man can commit.' But I take it that, important as that injunction and prohibi-

tion is, the Apostle's meaning is somewhat different, and that my text would perhaps be more accurately translated if another word were substituted for 'have no fellowship with.' The original expression seems rather to mean, 'Do not go partners with other people in works of darkness, which it takes more than one to commit.' Or, to put it into another language, the Apostle is regarding Christian people here as members of society, and exhorting them to a certain course of conduct in reference to plain and palpable existing evils around them. And such an exhortation to the duty of plain abstinence from things that the opinion of the world around us has no objection to, but which are contrary to the light, is addressed to all Christian people.

The need of it I do not require to illustrate at any length. But let me remind you that the devil has no more cunning way of securing a long lease of life for any evil than getting Christian people and Christian Churches to give it their sanction. What was it that kept slavery alive for centuries? Largely, that Christian men solemnly declared that it was a divine institution. What is it that has kept war alive for all these centuries? Largely, that bishops and preachers have always been ready to bless colours, and to read a Christening service over a man-of-war—and, I suppose, to ask God that an eighty-ton gun might be blessed to smash our enemies to pieces, and not to blow our sailors to bits. And what is it that preserves the crying evils of our community, the immoralities, the drunkenness, the trade dishonesty, and all the other things that I do not need to remind you of in the pulpit? Largely this, that professing Christians are mixed up with them. If only the whole body

of those who profess and call themselves Christians would shake their hands clear of all complicity with such things, they could not last. Individual responsibility for collective action needs to be far more solemnly laid to heart by professing Christians than ever it has been.

Nor need I remind you, I suppose, with what fatal effects on the Gospel and the Church itself all such complicity is attended. Even the companions of wrongdoers despise, whilst they fraternise with, the professing Christian who has no higher standard than their own. What was it that made the Church victorious over the combined forces of imperial persecution, pagan superstition, and philosophic speculation? I believe that among all the causes that a well-known historian has laid down for the triumph of Christianity, what was as powerful as—I was going to say even more than—the Gospel of peace and love which the Church proclaimed was the standard of austere morality which it held up to a world rotting in its own filth. And sure I am that wherever the Church says, ‘So do not I, because of the fear of the Lord,’ it will gain a power, and will be regarded with a possibly reluctant, but a very real, respect which no easy-going coming down to the level of popular moralities will ever secure for a silver-slippered Christianity. And so, brethren, I would say to you, Do not be afraid of the old name *Puritan*. Ignorant people use it as a scoff. It should be a crown of glory. ‘Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.’

But how is this to be done? Well, of course, there is only one way of abstaining, and that is, to abstain. But there are a great many different ways of abstain-

ing. Light is not fire. And the more that Christian people feel themselves bound to stand aloof from common evils, the more are they bound to see that they do it in the spirit of the Master, which is meekness. It is always an invidious position to take up. And if we take it up with any heat and temper, with any lack of moderation, with any look of ostentation of superior righteousness, or with any trace of the Boanerges spirit which says, 'Let us call down fire from heaven and consume them,' our testimony will be weakened, and the world will have a right to say to us, 'Jesus we know, and Paul we know; but who are ye?' 'Who made this man a judge and a divider over us?' 'In meekness instructing them that oppose themselves.'

III. Lastly, note the still harder Christian duty of vigorous protest.

The further duty beyond abstinence which the text enjoins is inadequately represented by our version, 'but rather reprove them.' For the word rendered in our version 'reprove' is the same which our Lord employed when He spoke of the mission of the Comforter as being to 'convince (or convict) the world of sin.' And it does not merely mean 'reprove,' but so to reprove as to produce the conviction which is the object of the reproof.

This task is laid on the shoulders of all professing Christians. A *silent* abstinence is not enough. No doubt, the best way, in some circumstances, to convict the darkness is to shine. Our holiness will convict sin of its ugliness. Our light will reveal the gloom. The presentation of a Christian life is the Christian man's mightiest weapon in his conflict with the world's evil. But that is not all. And if Christian people think that

they have done all their duty, in regard to clamant and common iniquities, by simply abstaining from them and presenting a nobler example, they have yet to learn one very important chapter of their duty. A dumb Church is a dying Church, and it ought to be; for Christ has sent us here in order, amongst other things, that we may bring Christian principles to bear upon the actions of the community; and not be afraid to speak when we are called upon by conscience to do so.

Now I am not going to dwell upon this matter, but I want just to point out to you how, in the context here, there are two or three very important principles glanced at which bear upon it. And one of them is this, that one reason for speaking out is the very fact that the evils are so evil that a man is ashamed to speak about them. Did you ever notice this context, in which the Apostle, in the next verse to my text, gives the reason for his commandment to 'reprove' thus—'*For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret*'? Did you ever hear of a fantastic tenderness for morality so very sensitive that it is not at all shocked when the immoral things are *done*, but glows with virtuous indignation when a Christian man speaks out about them? There are plenty of people nowadays who tell us that it is 'indelicate' and 'indecent' and 'improper,' and I do not know how much else, for a Christian teacher or minister to say a word about certain moral scandals. But they do not say anything about the immorality and the indelicacy and the indecency of doing them. Let us have done with that hypocrisy, brethren. I am arguing for no disregard for proprieties; I want all fitting reticence observed, and I do not wish indiscriminate rebukes

to be flung at foul things; but it is too much to require that, by reason of the very inky cloud of filth that they fling up like cuttlefish, they should escape censure. Let us remember Paul's exhortation, and reprove *because* the things are too bad to be spoken about.

Further, note in the context the thought that the conviction of the darkness comes from the flashing upon it of the light. 'All things when they are re-proved are made manifest by the light.' Which, being translated into other words, is this:—Be strong in your brave protest, because it only needs that the thing should be seen as it is, and called by its right name, in order to be condemned.

The Assyrians had a belief that if ever, by any chance, a demon saw himself in a mirror, he was frightened at his own ugliness and incontinently fled. And if Christian people would only hold up the mirror of Christian principle to the hosts of evil things that afflict our city and our country, they would vanish like ghosts at sunrise. They cannot stand the light, therefore let us cast the light upon them.

And do not forget the other final principle here, which is imperfectly represented by our translation. We ought to read, 'Whatever is made manifest is light.' Yes. In the physical world when light falls upon a thing, you see it because there is on it a surface of light. And in the moral world the intention of all this conviction is that the thing disclosed to be darkness should, in the very disclosure, cease to be dark, should forsake its nature and be transformed into light. Such transformation is not always the case. Alas! There are evil deeds on which the light falls, and it does nothing. But the purpose in all cases should be, and the issue in many will be, that the

merciful conviction by the light will be followed by the conversion of darkness into light.

And so, dear brethren, I bring this text to your hearts, and lay it upon your consciences. We may not all be called upon to speak; we are all called upon to *be*. You can shine, and by shining show how dark the darkness is. The obligation is laid upon us all; the commandment still comes to every Christian which was given to the old prophet, 'Declare unto My people their transgression, and to the house of Jacob their sin.' A quaint old writer says that the presence of a saint 'hinders the devil of elbow room to do his tricks.' We can all rebuke sin by our righteousness, and by our shining reveal the darkness to itself. We do not walk as children of the light unless we keep ourselves from all connivance with works of darkness. and by all means at our disposal reprove and convict them. 'Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch no unclean thing, saith the Lord.'

PAUL'S REASONS FOR TEMPERANCE

'And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. 12. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret. 13. But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light. 14. Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. 15. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, 16. Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. 17. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. 18. And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; 19. Speaking to yourselves in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; 20. Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; 21. Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.'—*EPH. v. 11-21.*

THERE are three groups of practical exhortations in this passage, of which the first deals with the Christian as a reproving light in darkness; the second, with the

Christian life as wisdom in the midst of folly; and the third with Christian sobriety and inspiration as the true exhilaration in contrast with riotous drunkenness. Probably such intoxication was prevalent in Ephesus in connection with the worship of 'Diana of the Ephesians,' for Paul was not the man to preach vague warnings against vices to which his hearers were not tempted. An under-current of allusion to such orgies accompanying the popular cult may be discerned in his words.

These two preceding sets of precepts can only be briefly touched on now. They lead up to the third, and the second is built on the first by a 'therefore' (ver. 15). The Apostle has just been saying that Christians were 'darkness, but are now light in the Lord,' and thence drawing the law for their life, to walk as 'children of light.' A very important part of such walk is recoiling from all share in 'the unfruitful works of darkness,'—a significant expression branding such deeds as being both bad in their source and in their results. Dark doings have consequences tragic enough and certain enough, but they are barren of all such issues as correspond to men's obligations and capacities. Their outcome is like the growths on a tree, which are not fruit, but products of disease. There is no fruit grown in the dark; there is no worthy product from us unless Christ is our light. If He is, and we are therefore 'light in the Lord,' we shall 'reprove' or 'convict' the Christless life. Its sinfulness will be shown by the contrast with the Christ-life. A thunder-cloud never looks so lividly black as when smitten by sunshine.

Our lives ought to make evil things ashamed to show their ugly faces. Christians should be, as it were, the incarnate conscience of a community. The Apostle is not thinking so much of words as of deeds, though

words are not to be withheld when needful. The agent of reproof is 'the light,' which here is the designation of character as transformed by Jesus, and the process of reproof or conviction is simply the manifestation of the evil in its true nature, which comes from setting it in the beams of the light. To show sin as it is, is to condemn it; 'for everything that is made manifest is light.' Observe that Paul here speaks of 'light,' not 'the light,'—that is, he is speaking now not of Christian character, which he had likened to light, but of physical light to which he had likened it, and is backing up his figurative statement as to the reproving and manifesting effects of the former, by the plain fact as to the latter, that, when daylight shines on anything, it is revealed, and, as it were, becomes light. He clenches his exhortation by quoting probably an early Christian hymn, which regards Christ as the great illuminator, ready to shine on all drowsy, dark souls as soon as they stir and rouse themselves from drugged and fatal sleep.

The second set of exhortations here is connected with the former by a 'therefore,' which refers to the whole preceding precept. Because the Christian is to shake himself free from complicity with works of darkness, and to be their living condemnation, he must take heed to his goings. A climber on a glacier has to look to his feet, or he will slip and fall down a crevasse, perhaps, from which he will never be drawn up. Heedlessness is folly in such a world as this. "'Don't care" comes to the gallows.' The temptation to 'go as you please' is strong in youth, and it is easy to scoff at 'cold-blooded folks who live by rule,' but they are the wise people, after all. A great element in that heedfulness is a quick insight into the special duty and

opportunity of the moment, for life is not merely made up of hours, but each has its own particular errand for us, and has some possibility in it which, neglected, may be lost for ever.

The mystic solemnity of time is that it is made up of 'seasons.' We shall walk heedfully in the degree in which we are awake to the moment's meaning, and grasp opportunity by the forelock, or, as Paul says, 'buy up the opportunity.' But wise heed to our walk is not enough, unless we have a sure standard by which to regulate it. A man may take great care of his watch, but unless he can compare it with a chronometer, or, as they do in Edinburgh, pull out their watches when the one o'clock gun is fired on a signal from Greenwich, he may be far out and not know it. So the Apostle adds the one way to keep our lives right, and the one source of true, practical wisdom—the 'understanding what the will of the Lord is.' He will not go far wrong whose instinctive question, as each new moment, with its solemn, animating possibilities, meets him, is, 'What wilt Thou have me to do?' He will not be nearly right who does not first of all ask that.

Then Paul comes to his precept of temperance. It naturally flows from the preceding, inasmuch as a drunken man is as sure to be incapable of taking heed to his conduct as of walking straight. He reels in both. He is stone-blind to the meaning of the moments. He hears no call, though the 'voice of the trumpet' may be 'exceeding loud,' and as for understanding what the will of the Lord is, that is far beyond him. The intoxication of an hour or the habit of drinking makes obedience to the foregoing precepts impossible. This master vice carries all other vices in its pocket.

Paul makes a daring, and, as some would think, an irreverent, comparison, when he proposes being 'filled with the Spirit' as the Christian alternative or substitute to being 'drunken with wine.' But the daring comparison suggests deep truth. The spurious exhilaration, the loosening of the bonds of care, the elevation above the pettiness and monotony of daily life, which the drunkard seeks, and is degraded and deceived in proportion as he momentarily finds, are all ours, genuinely, nobly, and to our infinite profit, if we have our empty spirits filled with that Divine Life. That exhilaration does not froth away, leaving bitter dregs in the cup. That loosening of the bonds of care, and elevation above life's sorrows, does not flow from foolish oblivion of facts, nor end in their being again roughly forced on us. 'Riot' bellows itself hoarse, and is succeeded by corresponding depression; but the calm joys of the Spirit-filled spirit last, grow, and become calmer and more joyful every day.

The boisterous songs of boon companions are set in contrast with the Christian 'psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,' which were already in use, and a snatch from one of which Paul has just quoted. Good-fellowship tempts men to drink together, and a song is a shoeing-horn for a glass; but the *camaraderie* is apt to end in blows, and is a poor caricature of the bond knitting all who are filled with the Spirit to one another, and making them willing to serve one another. The roystering or maudlin geniality cemented by drink generally ends in quarrels, as everybody knows that the truculent stage of intoxication succeeds the effusively affectionate one. But they who have the Spirit in them, and not only 'live in the Spirit,' but 'walk in the Spirit,' esteem each the other better than

themselves. In a word, to be filled with the Spirit is the way to possess all the highest forms of the good which men are tempted to intoxication to secure, and which in it they find only for a moment, and which is coarse and unreal.

SLEEPERS AT NOONDAY

'Wherefore He saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.'—EPH. v. 14.

THIS is the close of a short digression about 'light.' The 'wherefore' at the beginning of my text seems to refer to the whole of the verses that deal with that subject. It is as if the Apostle had said, 'I have been telling you about light and its blessed effects. Now I tell you how you may win it for yours. The condition on which it is to be received by men is that they awake and arise from the dead.'

'*He saith.*' Who? The speaker whose words are quoted is not named, but this is the common formula of quotation from the *Old Testament*. It is, therefore, probable that the word 'Creator' or 'God' is to be supplied. But there is no Old Testament passage which exactly corresponds to the words before us; the nearest approach to such being the ringing exhortation of the prophet to the Messianic Church, 'Arise! Shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.' And it is probable that the Apostle is here quoting, without much regard either to the original connection or the primary purpose of the word, a well-known old saying which seemed to him appropriately to fall in with the trend of his thoughts. Like other writers he often adorns his own words with the

citation of those of others without being very careful as to whether he, in some measure, diverts these from their original intention. But the words of my text fairly represent the prophetic utterance, in so far as they echo the call to the sleepers to wake, and share the prophet's confidence that light is streaming out for all those whose eyes are opened.

The want of precise correspondence between our text and the prophetic passage has led some to suppose that we have here the earliest recorded fragment of a Christian hymn. It would be interesting if that were so, but the formula of citation seems to oblige us to look to Scripture for the source from which my text is taken. However, let us leave these thoughts, and come to the text itself. It is an earnest call from God. It describes a condition, peals forth a summons, and gives a promise. Let us listen to what 'He saith' in all these regards.

I. First of all, then, the condition of the persons addressed.

The two sad metaphors, *slumberers* and *dead*, are applied to the same persons. There must, therefore, be some latitude in the application of the figures and they must be confined in their interpretation to some one or more points in which sleep and death are alike.

Now we all know that, as the proverb says, 'sleep is the image of death.' And what is the point of comparison? Mainly this, that the sleeper and the corpse are alike unconscious of an external world, unable to receive impressions from it, or to put forth action on it; and there, as I take it, is especially the point which is in the Apostle's view.

The sleeper and the dead man alike are in the midst

of an order of things of which they are all unaware. And you and I live in two worlds, one, this low, fleeting, material one; and the other the white, snowy peaks that girdle it as do the Alps the Lombard plains; and men live all unconscious of that which lies on their horizon. But the metaphor of a level ground encircled by mountains does not fully represent the closeness of the connection between these two worlds, of both of which every one of us is a denizen. For on all sides, pressing in upon us, enfolding us like an atmosphere, penetrating into all the material, underlying all which is visible, all of which has its roots in the unseen, is that world which the mass of men are in a conspiracy to ignore and forget. And just as the sleeper is unconscious of all around him in his chamber, and of all the stir and beauty of the world in which he lives, so the bulk of us go blind and darkling through life, absorbed in the things seen, and never lift even a momentary and lack-lustre glance to the august realities which lie behind these, and give them all their significance and beauty.

Yes; and just as in a dream men are busy with baseless phantoms that vanish and are forgotten, and seem to themselves to be occupied, whilst all the while they are lying prone and passive, so the mass of us are sleep-walkers. What are many men who will be hurrying on to the Manchester Exchange on Tuesday? What are they but men who are dreaming that they are at work, but are only at work on dreams which will vanish when the eyes are opened? Practical men, who are busy and absorbed with affairs and with the things of this present, curl their lips about 'idealists' of all sorts, be they idealists of thought, or of art, or of benevolence, or of religion, and call them dreamers.

The boot is on the other leg. It is the idealists that are awake, and it is you people that live for to-day, and have not learned that to-day is a little fragment and sliver of eternity—it is you who are dreamers, and all these things round about us—the solid-seeming realities—are illusions, and

‘Like the bubbles on a river,
Sparkling, bursting, borne away,’

they will disappear. There is only one reality, and that is God, and the only lives that lay hold of the substance are those which grasp Him. The rest of you are shadows hunting for shadows.

The two metaphors of my text coincide in suggesting another thing, and that is the awful contrast in the average life between what is in a man and what comes out of him. ‘Dormant power,’ we talk about. Ah, how tragically the true man is dormant in all the work of worldly hearts! God has made a great mistake in making you what you are, if there is no place for you to exercise your powers in but this present world, and nothing to exercise them on except the things that pass and perish. Travellers in lands where civilisation used to be, and barbarism now is, find sculptured stones from temples turned into fences for cattle-sheds and walls round pigstyes. And that is something like what men do with the faculties that God has given them. Why, the best part of you, brother, if you are not a Christian, and living a Christian life—the best part of you is asleep, and it is only the lower nature of you that is awake! Sometimes the sleepers stir uneasily. It used to be said that earthquakes were caused by a giant rolling himself from side to side in his troubled slumber. And

there are earthquakes in your heart and spirit caused by the half-waking of the dormant self, the true man, who is immersed and embruted in sense and the things of time. Some of you by earthly lusts, some of you by over-indulgence in fleshly appetites, eating and drinking and the like; some of you by absorption in the mere externals of trade and profession and occupation to the entire neglect of the inward thing which would glorify and exalt these—but all of us somehow, unless we are living for God, have lulled our best, true, central self into slumber, and lie as if dead.

Now, brethren, do not forget that this exhortation of my text, and therefore this description, is addressed to a community of professing Christians. I hope you will not misunderstand me as if I thought that such a picture as I have been trying to draw applies only to men that have no religion in them at all. It applies in varying degrees to men that have, as—I was going to say the bulk, but perhaps that is exaggeration, let me say a tragically large number—of professing Christians, and a proportionate number of the professing Christians in this audience have, a little life and a great circumference of death. Dear brethren, you may call yourselves, and may be Christian people, and have somewhat shaken off the torpor, and roused yourself from the slumbering death of which I have been speaking. Remember that it still hangs to you, and that it was of Christians that the Master said: 'Whilst the Lord was away they all slumbered and slept'; and that it was of a Christian Church, and not of a pagan world, that the same voice from heaven said: 'Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.' And so I beseech you, bear with me, and do not think I am scolding, or flinging about wild words

at random, when I make a very earnest appeal to each individual professing, and real, Christian in this congregation, and ask them to consider, each for themselves, how much of sleep is still in their drowsy eyes, and how far it is true that the quickening life of Jesus Christ has penetrated, as the sunbeams into the darkness, into the heavy mass of their natural death.

II. Secondly, let me ask you to look at the summons to awake.

It comes like the morning bugle to an army, 'Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead.' Now, I am not going to waste your time by talking about the old, well-worn, interminable, and unprofitable controversy as to God's part and man's in this awaking, but I do wish to insist upon this plain fact, that the command here presupposes upon our parts, whether we be Christian people or not, the ability to obey. God would not mock a man by telling him to do what he cannot do. And it is perfectly clear that the one attitude in which we may be sure of God's help to keep any of His commandments, and this amongst the rest, is when we are trying to keep them. 'Stretch out thy hand,' said Christ to the man whose disease was that he could not stretch it out. 'Arise and walk,' said Christ to the man whose lifelong sadness it was that his limbs had no power. 'Lazarus, come forth,' said Christ unto the dull, cold ear of death. And Lazarus heard, wherever he was, and, though his feet were tangled with the graveclothes, he came stumbling out, because the power to do what he was bid had come wrapped in the command to do it. And if these other two men had turned to Jesus and said, 'What is the use of telling me to stretch out my hand,

or me to move my limbs? Thou knowest that I cannot,' they would have lain there paralysed till they died. But when they heard the command there came a tingling sense of new ability into the withered limb. 'And he stretched forth his hand, and it was restored whole as the other.' Ay, but the process of restoration began when he willed to stretch it out in obedience to the command, which was a promise as much as a command. So we need not trouble ourselves with the question how the dead man can arise, or how the sleeper can wake himself.

This, at all events, is clear, that if what I have been saying is true as to the main point in view in both the metaphors, viz. the unconsciousness of the unseen world, and the slumbering powers that we have within us, then the remedy for that is in our own hands. There are scarcely any limits to be put to a man's capacity of determining for himself what shall be the object of his thought, his interest, his affection, or his pursuits. You can withdraw your desires and contemplations from the intrusive and absorbing present. You can coerce yourselves to concentrate more thought than you do, more interest, affection, and effort than you have ever done, upon the things that are unseen. You can turn your gaze thither. You cannot directly and immediately regulate your feelings, but you can settle the thoughts which shall guide the feelings, and you can, and you do, fix for yourselves, though not consciously, the things which shall be uppermost in your regard, and supreme in the ordering of your life.

And so the commandment of my text is but this, 'Wake from the illusions; rouse yourselves to the contemplation of the things unseen and eternal. Let

the Lord always be before your face.' And you will be awake and alive.

III. And so my last point is the promise of the morning light which gladdens the wakeful eye. 'Christ shall give thee light.'

Now, if the words of my text are an allusion to the prophecy to which I have already referred, it is striking to observe, though I cannot dwell upon the thought, that Paul here unhesitatingly ascribes to Jesus Christ an action which, in the source of his quotation, is ascribed to Jehovah. 'Arise, shine, for thy light has come, and the glory of *Jehovah* is risen upon thee,' says the prophet. 'Arise! thou that sleepest,' says Paul, 'and *Christ* shall give thee light.' As always, he regards his Lord as possessed of fully divine attributes; and he has learned the depth of the Master's own saying, 'Whatsoever things the Father doeth, these also doeth the Son *likewise*.' But I turn from that to the main point to be insisted upon here, that the Apostle is setting forth this as a certainty, that if a man will open his eyes he will have light enough. The sunshine is flooding the world. It falls upon the closed eyelids of the sleepers, and would fain gently lift them, that it might enter. A man needs nothing more than to shake off the slumber, and bring himself into the conscious presence of the unseen glories that surround us, in order to get light enough and to spare—whether you mean by light knowledge for guidance on the path of life, or whether you mean by it purity that shall scatter the darkness of evil from the heart, or whether you mean by it the joy that comes in the morning, radiant and fresh as the sunrise over the Eastern hills. 'Awake, and *Christ shall* give thee light.'

The miracle of Goshen is reversed, in the case of many of us, the land is flashing in the sunshine, but within our houses there is midnight darkness, not because there is not light around, but because the shutters are shut. Oh, brethren, it is a solemn thing to choose the darkness rather than the light. And you do that—though not consciously, and in so many words, making your election—by indifference, by neglect, by the direction of the main current of your thoughts and desires and aims to perishable things, and by the deeds that follow from such a disposition. These choose for you, and you, in effect, choose by them.

I beseech you, do not let Christ's own trumpet-call fall upon your ears, as if faint and far away, like the unwelcome summons that comes to a drowsy man in the morning. You know that if, having been called, he makes up his mind to lie a little longer, he is almost sure to fall more dead asleep than he was before. And if you hear, however dim, distantly, and through my poor words, Christ's voice saying to you, 'Awake! thou that sleepest,' do not neglect it. The only safe course is to spring up at once. If thou dost, 'Christ shall give thee light,' never fear. The light is all about you. You only need to open your eyes, and it will pour in. If you do not, you surround yourself with darkness that may be felt here, and ensures for yourself a horror of great darkness in the death hereafter.

REDEEMING THE TIME

'See, then, that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.'—EPH. v. 15, 16.

SOME of us have, in all probability, very little more 'time' to 'redeem.' Some of us have, in all probability, the prospect of many years yet to live. For both classes my text presents the best motto for another year. The most frivolous among us, I suppose, have some thoughts when we step across the conventional boundary that seems to separate the unbroken sequence of moments into periods; and as you in your business take stock and see how your accounts stand, so I would fain, for you and myself, make this a moment in which we may see where we are going, what we are doing, and how we are using this great gift of life.

My text gives us the true Christian view of time. It tells us what to do with it, and urges by implication certain motives for the conduct.

I. We have, first, what we ought to think about 'the time.'

There are two words in the New Testament, both of which are translated *time*, but they mean very different things. One of them, the more common, simply implies the succession of moments or periods; the other, which is employed here, means rather a definite portion of time to which some definite work or occurrence belongs. It is translated sometimes *season*, sometimes *opportunity*. Both these renderings occur in immediate proximity in the Epistle to the Galatians, where the Apostle says: 'As we have therefore opportunity let us do good to all men, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. . . .' And, again, it is employed side

by side with the other word to which I have referred, in the Acts of the Apostles, where we read, 'It is not for you to know the times or the seasons'—the former word simply indicating the succession of moments, the latter word indicating epochs or crises to which special work or events belong.

And so here 'redeeming the *time*' does not merely mean making the most of moments, but means laying hold of, and understanding the special significance of, life as a whole, and of each succeeding instant of it as the season for some specific duty. It is not merely 'time,' it is '*the time*'; not merely the empty succession of beats of the pendulum, but these moralised, as it were, heightened, and having significance, because each is apprehended as having a special mission, and affording an opportunity for a special work.

Now, there are two aspects of that general thought, on each of which I would touch. The Apostle here uses the singular number, and speaks not of the times, but of 'the time'; as if the whole of life were an opportunity, a season for some one clear duty which manifestly belongs to it, and is meant to be done in it.

What is that? There are a great many ways of answering that question, but even more important perhaps than the way of answering is the mood of mind which asks it. If we could only get into this, as our habitual temper and disposition, asking ourselves what life is for, then we should have conquered nine-tenths of our temptations, and all but secured that we shall aim at the purpose which thus clearly and constantly shines before us. Oh! if I could get some of my friends here this morning, who have never really looked this solemn question in the face, to rise above the mere accidents of their daily occupations,

and to take their orders, not from circumstances, or from the people whom they admire and imitate, but at first hand from considering what they really are here for, and why their days in their whole sweep are given them, I should not have spoken in vain. The sensualist answers the question in one way, the busy Manchester man in another, the careful, burdened mother in another, the student in another, the moralist in another. But all that is good in each answer is included in the wider one, that the end of life, the purpose for which 'the season' is granted us, is that 'we should glorify God and enjoy Him for ever.'

I do not care whether you say that the end for which we live is the salvation of our souls, or whether you put it in other words, and say that it is the cultivation and perfecting of a Christ-like and God-pleasing character, or whether you admit still another aspect, and say that it is the intention of time to prepare us for that which lies beyond time. Time is the lackey of eternity, and the chamberlain that opens the gates of the Kingdom of God. All these various answers are at bottom one. Life is ours mainly in order that, by faith in Jesus Christ, we should struggle, and do, and by struggles, by sorrows, and by all that befalls us, should grow liker Him, and so fitter for the calm joys of that place where the throb of the pendulum has ceased, and the hours are stable and eternal. We live here in order to get ready for living yonder. And we get ready for living yonder, when here we understand that every moment of life is granted us for the one purpose, which can be pursued through all life—viz. the becoming liker our dear Lord, and the drinking in to our own hearts more of His Spirit, and moulding our characters more in conformity with His image.

That is what my life and yours are given us for. If we succeed in that, we succeed all round. If we fail in that, whatever else we succeed in, we have failed altogether.

But then, remember, still further, the other aspect in which we can look at this thought. That ultimate, all-embracing end is reached through a multitude of nearer and intermediate ones. Whilst life, as a whole, is the season for learning to know and for possessing God, life is broken up into smaller portions and periods, each of which has some special duty appropriate to it and a 'lesson for the day.'

Now many of us, who entirely agree, theoretically, in saying that all life is granted for this highest purpose, go wrong here and fail to discern the significance of single moments. To-day is always commonplace; it is yesterday that is beautiful, and to-morrow that is full of possibilities, to the vulgar mind. But to-day is common and low. There are mountains ahead and mountains behind, purple with distance and radiant with sunshine, and the sky bends over them and seems to touch their crests. But here, on the spot where we stand, life seems flat and mean, and far away from the heavens. We admit the meaning of life taken altogether, but it is very hard to break up that recognition into fragments, and to feel the worth of these fleeting moments which, just because they are here, seem to be of small account. So we forget that life is only the aggregate of small present instants, and that the hour is sixty times sixty insignificant seconds, and the day twenty-four brief hours, and the year 365 commonplace days, and the life threescore years and ten. Brethren, carry your theoretical recognition of the greatness and solemnity of the purposes for which

life has been given here into each of the moments of the passing day, and you will find that there is nothing so elastic as time; and that you can crowd into a day as much as a languid thousand years do sometimes hold, of sacrifice and service, of holy joys, and of likeness to Jesus Christ. He who has learned that all the moments are heavy with significance, and pregnant with immortal issues, he, too, in some measure may share in the prerogative of the timeless God, and to Him 'one day may be as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.' It is not the beat of the pendulum or the tick of the clock that measure time, but it is the deeds which we crowd into it, and the feelings and thoughts which it ministers to us. This passing life draws all its importance from the boundless eternal issues to which it leads. Every little puddle on the paving-stones this morning, a quarter of an inch broad and a film deep, will be mirroring bright sunshine, and blue with the reflected heaven. And so we may make the little drop of our lives radiant with the image of God, and bright with the certainties of immortality.

II. Now, note secondly, how to make the most of the season.

'Redeeming the time,' says the Apostle. The figure is very simple and natural, and has only been felt to be difficult and obscure, because people have tried to ride the metaphor further than it was meant. The questions of who is the seller and what is the price do not enter into the Apostle's mind at all. Metaphors are not to be driven so far as that. We have to confine ourselves to the simple thought that there is a need for making the opportunity which is given truly our own; and that that can only be done by giving something in exchange for it. That is the notion of purchase, is it

not? Acquisition, by giving something else. Thus, says Paul, you have to buy the opportunity which time affords us.

That is to say, to begin with, life gives us opportunities and no more. We *may*, in and through it, become wise, good, pure, happy, noble, Christ-like, or we may not. The opportunity is there, swinging, as it were, *in vacuo*. Lay hold of it, says he, and turn it into more than an opportunity—even an actuality and a fact.

And how is that to be done? We have to give something away, if we get the opportunity for our very own. What have we to give away? Well, mainly the lower ends for which the moment might serve. These have to be surrendered—sometimes abandoned altogether, always rigidly restricted and kept in utter subordination to the highest purposes. To-day is given us mainly that we may learn to know God better, and to love Him more, and to serve Him more joyfully. Our daily duties are given us for the same purpose. But if we go about them without thinking of God or the highest ends which life is meant to serve, then we shall certainly lose the highest ends, and an opportunity will go past us unimproved. But if, on the other hand, whilst we follow our daily business for the sake of legitimate temporal gain, we see, above that, the aspect of daily life as educating in all Christian nobleness and lofty thoughts and purposes, then we shall have given away the lower ends for the sake of attaining the higher. You live, suppose, to found a business, to become masters of your trade, to gain wisdom and knowledge, to establish for yourselves a position amongst your fellow-men, to cultivate your character so as to grow in wisdom and purity, apart from God. Or you live in order to

win affection and move thankfully in the heaven of loving associations in your home, amongst your children. Or you live for the sake of carrying some lower but real good amongst men. Many of these ends are beautiful and noble, and necessary for the cultivation and discharge of the various duties and relationships of life; but unless they are all kept secondary, and there towers above them this other, life is wasted. If life is not to be wasted, they must be bartered for the higher, and we must recognise that to give all things for the sake of Christ and His love is wise merchandise and good exchange. 'What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea! doubtless, and I count all things but loss that I may win Him and be found of Him.' You must barter the lower if you are to secure the higher ends for which life is the appointed season.

And then, still more minutely, my text gives us another suggestion about this 'redeeming the time.' 'See, then,' says the Apostle, 'that ye walk circumspectly.' The word rendered circumspectly might better, perhaps, be translated in some such way as 'strictly,' 'rigidly,' 'accurately,' 'punctiliously.' As I take it, it is to be connected with the 'walk,' and not with the 'see, then,' as the Revised Version does.

So here is a practical direction, walk strictly, accurately, looking to your feet; as a man would do who was upon what they call in the Alps an *arrête*. Suppose a narrow ridge of snow piled on the top of a ledge of rock, with a precipice of 5000 feet on either side, and a cornice of snow hanging over empty space. The climber puts his alpenstock before his foot, he tests with his foot before he rests his weight, for a false step and down he goes!

‘See that you walk circumspectly,’ rigidly, accurately, punctiliously. Live by law—that is to say, live by principles which imply duties; for to live by inclination is ruin. The only safety is, look to your feet and look to your road, and restrain yourselves, ‘and so redeem the time.’

There is something else to look to. Feet? Yes! Road? Yes! But also look to your guide. Tread in Christ’s footsteps, ‘follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.’ Make Him the pattern and example, and then you shall walk safely; and the path will carry you right into ‘His presence where there is fulness of joy.’ No great, noble, right, blessed life is lived without rigid self-control, self-denial, and self-crucifixion. Do not fancy that that means the absence of joy and spontaneity. ‘I will walk at liberty for I keep Thy precepts.’ Hedges are blessings when, on the other side, there are bottomless swamps of poisonous miasma, into which if a man ventures he will either drown or be plague-stricken. The narrow way that leads to life is the way of peace, just because it is a way of restrictions. Better to walk on the narrowest path that leads to the City than to be chartered libertines, wandering anywhere at our own bitter wills, and finding ‘no end, in devious mazes lost.’ Freedom consists in obeying from the heart the restriction of love; and walking punctiliously.

III. Lastly, note the motives for this course.

The Apostle says, ‘see that ye walk strictly, not as fools but as wise.’ That is to say, such limitation, which buys the opportunity and uses it for the highest purposes, is the only true wisdom. If you take the mean, miserable, partial, fleeting purposes for which some of us, alas, are squandering our lives, and contrast

these with the great, perfect, all-satisfying, blessed, and eternal end for which it was given us, how can we escape being convicted of folly? One day, dear friends, it will be found out that the virgins that were not ready when the Lord came were the foolish ones. One day it will be asked of you and of me, 'What did you do with the life which I gave you, that you might know Me?' And if we have only the answer, 'O Lord! I founded a big business in Manchester—I made a fortune—I wrote a clever book, that was most favourably reviewed—I brought up a family'—the only thing fit to be said to us is, 'Thou fool!' The only wisdom is the wisdom that secures the end for which life was given.

Then there is another motive here. 'Redeeming the time *because* the days are evil.' That is singular. 'The days' are 'the time,' and yet they are 'evil' days, which being translated into other words is just this—we are to make a definite effort to keep in view, and to effect, the purposes for which all the days of our lives are given us, because these days have in themselves a tendency to draw us away from the true path and to blind us as to their real meaning. The world is full of possibilities of good and evil, and the same day which, in one aspect, is the 'season' for serving God is, in another aspect, an 'evil' day which may draw us away from Him. And if we do not put out manly effort, it certainly will do so. The ocean is meant to bear the sailor to his port, but from the waves rise up fair forms, siren voices, with sweet harps and bright eyes that tempt the weary mariner to his destruction. And the days which may be occasions for our getting nearer God, if we let them work their will upon us, will be evil days which draw us away from Him.

Let me add one last motive which is not stated in my

text, but is involved in the very idea of *opportunity* or *season*—viz. that the time for the high and noble purposes of which I have been speaking is rigidly limited and bounded; and once past is irrevocable. The old, wise mythological story tells us that Occasion is bald behind, and is to be grasped by the forelock. The moment that is past had in it wonderful possibilities for us. If we did not grasp them with promptitude and decision they have gone for ever. You may as well try to bring back the water that has been sucked over Niagara, and churned into white foam at its base, as to recall the wasted opportunities. They stand all along the course of our years, solemn monuments of our unfaithfulness, and none of them can ever return again. Life is full of too-lates; that sad sound that moans through the roofless ruins of the past, like the wind through some deserted temple. ‘Too late, too late; ye cannot enter now.’ ‘The sluggard will not plough by reason of the cold, therefore he shall beg in harvest and have nothing.’ Oh! let us see to it that we wring out of the passing moments their highest possibilities of noblest good. Let us begin to live; for only he who lives to God really lives. Life is given to us that we may know Jesus Christ—trust Him, love Him, serve Him, be like Him. That is the pearl which, if we bring up from the sea of time, we shall not have been cast in vain into its stormy waves. Do you take care that this new year which is dawning upon us go not to join the many wasted years that lie desolate behind us, but let us all see to it that the flood which sweeps us and it away bears us straight to God, Who is our home. ‘Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.’

'THE PANOPLY OF GOD

'Take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.'—Eph. vi. 13.

THE military metaphor of which this verse is the beginning was obviously deeply imprinted on Paul's mind. It is found in a comparatively incomplete form in his earliest epistle, the first to the Thessalonians, in which the children of the day are exhorted to put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. It reappears, in a slightly varied form, in the Epistle to the Romans, where those whose salvation is nearer than when they believed, are exhorted, because the day is at hand, to cast off, as it were, their night-gear, and to put on the 'armour of light'; and here, in this Epistle of the Captivity, it is most fully developed. The Roman legionary, to whom Paul was chained, here sits all unconsciously for his portrait, every detail of which is pressed by Paul into the service of his vivid imagination; the virtues and graces of the Christian character, which are 'the armour of light,' are suggested to the Apostle by the weapon which the soldier by his side wore. The vulgarest and most murderous implements assume a new character when looked upon with the eyes of a poet and a Christian. Our present text constitutes the general introduction to the great picture which follows, of 'the panoply of God.'

I. We must be ready for times of special assaults from evil.

Most of us feel but little the stern reality underlying the metaphor, that the whole Christian life is warfare, but that in that warfare there are crises, seasons of

special danger. The interpretation which makes the 'evil day' co-extensive with the time of life destroys the whole emphasis of the passage: whilst all days are days of warfare, there will be, as in some prolonged siege, periods of comparative quiet; and again, days when all the cannon belch at once, and scaling ladders are reared on every side of the fortress. In a long winter there are days sunny and calm followed, as they were preceded, by days when all the winds are let loose at once. For us, such times of special danger to Christian character may arise from temporal vicissitudes. Joy and prosperity are as sure to occasion them as are sorrows, for to Paul the 'evil day' is that which especially threatens moral and spiritual character, and these may be as much damaged by the bright sunshine of prosperity as by the midwinter of adversity, just as fierce sunshine may be as fatal as killing frost. They may also arise, without any such change in circumstances, from some temptation coming with more than ordinary force, and directed with terrible accuracy to our weakest point.

These evil days are ever wont to come on us suddenly; they are heralded by no storm signals and no falling barometer. We may be like soldiers sitting securely round their camp fire, till all at once bullets begin to fall among them. The tiger's roar is the first signal of its leap from the jungle. Our position in the world, our ignorance of the future, the heaped-up magazines of combustibles within, needing only a spark, all lay us open to unexpected assaults, and the temptation comes stealthily, 'as a thief in the night.' Nothing is so certain as the unexpected. For these reasons, then, because the 'evil day' will certainly come, because it may come at any time, and because it

is most likely to come 'when we look not for it,' it is the dictate of plain common sense to be prepared. If the good man of the house had known at what hour the thief would have come, he would have watched; but he would have been a wiser man if he had watched all the more, because he did *not* know at what hour the thief would come.

II. To withstand these we must be armed against them before they come.

The main point of the exhortation is this previous preparation. It is clear enough that it is no time to fly to our weapons when the enemy is upon us. Aldershot, not the battlefield, is the place for learning strategy. Belshazzar was sitting at his drunken feast while the Persians were marching on Babylon, and in the night he was slain. When great crises arise in a nation's history, some man whose whole life has been preparing him for the hour starts to the front and does the needed work. If a sailor put off learning navigation till the wind was howling and a reef lay ahead, his corpse would be cast on the cruel rocks. It is well not to be 'over-exquisite,' to cast the fashion of 'uncertain evils,' but certain ones cannot be too carefully anticipated, nor too sedulously prepared for.

The manner in which this preparation is to be carried out is distinctly marked here. The armour is to be put on before the conflict begins. Now, without anticipating what will more properly come in considering subsequent details, we may notice that such a previous assumption implies mainly two things—a previous familiarity with God's truth, and a previous exercise of Christian virtues. As to the former, the subsequent context speaks of taking the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, and of having the

loins girt with truth, which may be objective truth. As to the latter, we need not elaborate the Apostle's main thought that resistance to sudden temptations is most vigorous when a man is accustomed to goodness. One of the prophets treats it as being all but impossible that they who have been accustomed to evil shall learn to do well, and it is at least not less impossible that they who have been accustomed to do well shall learn to do evil. Souls which habitually walk in the clear spaces of the bracing air on the mountains of God will less easily be tempted down to the shut-in valleys where malaria reigns. The positive exercise of Christian graces tends to weaken the force of temptation. A mind occupied with these has no room for it. Higher tastes are developed which makes the poison sweetness of evil unsavoury, and just as the Israelites hungered for the strong, coarse-smelling leeks and garlic of Egypt, and therefore loathed 'this light bread,' so they whose palates have been accustomed to manna will have little taste for leeks and garlic. The mental and spiritual activity involved in the habitual exercise of Christian virtues will go far to make the soul unassailable by evil. A man, busily occupied, as the Apostle would have us to be, may be tempted by the devil, though less frequently the more he is thus occupied; but one who has no such occupations and interests tempts the devil. If our lives are inwardly and secretly honeycombed with evil, only a breath will be needed to throw down the structure. It is possible to become so accustomed to the calm delights of goodness, that it would need a moral miracle to make a man fall into sin.

III. To be armed with this armour, we must get it from God.

Though it consists mainly of habitudes and dispositions of our own minds, none the less have we to receive these from above. It is 'the panoply of God,' therefore we are to be endued with it, not by exercises in our own strength, but by dependence on Him. In old days, before a squire was knighted, he had to keep a vigil in the chapel of the castle, and through the hours of darkness to watch his armour and lift his soul to God, and we shall never put on the armour of light unless in silence we draw near to Him who teaches our hands to war and our fingers to fight. Communion with Christ, and only communion with Christ, receives from Him the life which enables us to repel the diseases of our spirits. What He imparts to those who thus wait upon Him, and to them only, is the Spirit which helps their infirmities and clothes their undefended nakedness with a coat of mail. If we go forth to war with evil, clothed and armed only with what we can provide, we shall surely be worsted in the fray. If we go forth into the world of struggle from the secret place of the Most High, 'no weapon that is formed against us shall prosper,' and we shall be more than conquerors through Him that loved us.

But waiting on God to receive our weapons from Him is but part of what is needful for our equipment. It is we who have to gird our loins and put on the breastplate, and shoe our feet, and take the shield of faith, and the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit. The cumbrous armour of old days could only be put on by the help of another pulling straps, and fixing buckles, and lifting and bracing heavy shields on arms, and fastening helmets upon heads; but we have, by our own effort, to clothe ourselves with God's great gift, which is of no use to us, and is in no

real sense ours, unless we do. It takes no small effort to keep ourselves in the attitude of dependence and receptivity, without which none of the great gifts of God come to us, and, least of all, the habitual practice of Christian virtues. The soldier who rushed into the fight, leaving armour and arms huddled together on the ground, would soon fall, and God's giving avails nothing for our defence unless there is also our taking. It is the woful want of taking the things that are freely given to us of God, and of making our own what by His gift is our own, that is mainly responsible for the defeats of which we are all conscious. Looking back on our own evil days, we must all be aware that our defeats have mainly come from one or other of the two errors which lie so near us all, and which are intimately connected with each other—the one being that of fighting in our own strength, and the other being that of leaving unused our God-given power.

IV. The issue of successful resistance is increased firmness of footing.

If we are able to 'withstand in the evil day,' we shall 'stand' more securely when the evil day has stormed itself away. If we keep erect in the shock of battle, we shall stand more secure when the wild charge has been beaten back. The sea hurls tons of water against the slender lighthouse on the rock, and if it stands, the smashing of the waves consolidates it. The reward of firm resistance is increased firmness. As the Red Indians used to believe that the strength of the slain enemies whom they had scalped passed into their arms, so we may have power developed by conflict, and we shall more fully understand, and more passionately believe in, the principles and truths which have served us in past fights. David would not wear Saul's armour

because, as he said, 'I have not proved it,' and the Christian who has come victoriously through one struggle should be ready to say, 'I have proved it'; we have the word of the Lord, which is *tried*, to trust to, and not we only, but generations, have tested it, and it has stood the tests. Therefore, it is not for us to hesitate as to the worth of our weapons, or to doubt that they are more than sufficient for every conflict which we may be called upon to wage.

The text plainly implies that all our life long we shall be in danger of sudden assaults. It does contemplate victory in the evil day, but it also contemplates that after we have withstood, we have still to stand and be ready for another attack to-morrow. Our life here is, and must still be, a continual warfare. Peace is not bought by any victories; 'There is no discharge in that war.' Like the ten thousand Greeks who fought their way home through clouds of enemies from the heart of Asia, we are never safe till we come to the mountain-top, where we can cry, 'The Sea!' But though all our paths lead us through enemies, we have Jesus, who has conquered them all, with us, and our hearts should not fail so long as we can hear His brave voice encouraging us: 'In the world ye have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.'

'THE GIRDLE OF TRUTH'

'Stand, therefore, having girded your loins with truth.'—EPH. vi. 14 (R.V.).

THE general exhortation here points to the habitual attitude of the Christian soldier. However many conflicts he may have waged, he is still to be ever ready

for fresh assaults, for in regard to them he may be quite sure that to-morrow will bring its own share of them, and that the evil day is never left behind so long as days still last. That general exhortation is followed by clauses which are sometimes said to be cotemporaneous with it, and to be definitions of the way in which it is to be accomplished, but they are much rather statements of what is to be done before the soldier takes his stand. He is to be fully equipped first: he is to take up his position second. We may note that, in all the list of his equipment, there is but one weapon of offence—the sword of the Spirit; all the rest are defensive weapons. The girdle, which is the first specified, is not properly a weapon at all, but it comes first because the belt keeps all the other parts of the armour in place, and gives agility to the wearer. Having girded your loins (R.V.) is better than having your loins girded (A.V.), as bringing out more fully that the assumption of the belt is the soldier's own doing.

I. We must be braced up if we are to fight.

Concentration and tension of power is an absolute necessity for any effort, no matter how poor may be the aims to which it is directed, and what is needed for the successful prosecution of the lowest transient successes will surely not be less indispensable in the highest forms of life. If a poor runner for a wreath of parsley or of laurel cannot hope to win the fading prize unless all his powers are strained to the uttermost, the Christian athlete has still more certainly to run, so as the racer has to do, 'that he may obtain.' Loose-flowing robes are caught by every thorn by the way, and a soul which is not girded up is sure to be hindered in its course. 'This one thing I do' is the secret of all

successful doing, and obedience to the command of Jesus, 'let your loins be girded about,' is indispensable, if we would avoid polluting contact with evil. His other command associated with it will never be accomplished without it. The lamps will not be burning unless the loins are girt. The men who scatter their loves and thoughts over a wide space, and to whom the discipline which confines their energies within definite channels is distasteful, are destined to be failures in the struggle of life. It is better to have our lives running between narrow banks, and so to have a scour in the stream, than to have them spreading wide and shallow, with no driving force in all the useless expanse. Such concentration and bracing of oneself up is needful, if any of the rest of the great exhortations which follow are to be fulfilled.

It may be that Paul here has haunting his memory our Lord's words which we have just quoted; and, in any case, he is in beautiful accord with his brother Peter, who begins all the exhortations of his epistle with the words, 'Wherefore, girding up the loins of your mind, be sober, and set your minds perfectly upon the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.' Peter, indeed, is not thinking of the soldier's belt, but he is, no doubt, remembering many a time when, in the toils of the fishing-boat, he had to tighten his robes round his waist to prepare for tugging at the oar, and he feels that such concentration is needful if a Christian life is ever to be sober, and to have its hope set perfectly on Christ and His grace.

II. The girdle is to be truth.

The question immediately arises as to whether truth here means objective truth—the truth of the Gospel, or subjective truth, or, as we are accustomed to say,

truthfulness. It would seem that the former signification is rather included in the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, and it is best to regard the phrase 'with (literally "in") truth' here as having its ordinary meaning, of which we may take as examples the phrases, 'the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth'; 'love rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth with the truth'; 'whom I love in truth.' Absolute sincerity and transparent truthfulness may well be regarded as the girdle which encloses and keeps secure every other Christian grace and virtue.

We do not need to go far to find a slight tinge of unreality marring the Christian life: we have only to scrutinise our own experiences to detect some tendency to affectation, to saying a little more than is quite true, even in our sincerest worship. And we cannot but recognise that in all Christian communities there is present an element of conventionalism in their prayers, and that often the public expression of religious emotions goes far beyond the realities of feeling in the worshippers. In fact, terrible as the acknowledgment may be, we shall be blind if we do not recognise that the average Christianity of this day suffers from nothing more than it does from the lack of this transparent sincerity, and of absolute correspondence between inward fact and outward expression. Types of Christianity which make much of emotion are, of course, specially exposed to such a danger, but those which make least of it are not exempt, and we all need to lay to heart, far more seriously than we ordinarily do, that God 'desires truth in the outward parts.' The sturdy English moralist who proclaimed 'Clear your mind of cant' as the first condition of attaining wisdom, was not so very far from Paul's point of view in our text,

but his exhortation covered but a small section of the Apostle's.

This absolute sincerity is hard to attain, and still harder to retain. Hideous as the fact of posing or attitudinising in our religion may be, it is one that comes very easily to us all, and, when it comes, spreads fast and spoils everything. Just as the legionary's armour was held in its place by the girdle, and if that worked loose or was carelessly fastened, the breast-plate would be sure to get out of position, so all the subsequent graces largely depend for their vigorous exercise on the prime virtue of truthfulness. Righteousness and faith will be weakened by the fatal taint of insincerity, and, on the other hand, conscious truthfulness will give strength to the whole man. Braced up and concentrated, our powers for all service and for all conflict will be increased. 'The bond of perfectness' is, no doubt, 'Love,' but that perfect bond will not be worn by us, unless we have girded our loins with truthfulness.

It may be that in Paul's memory there is floating Isaiah's great vision of the 'Branch' out of the stock of Jesse, on whom the Spirit of the Lord was to rest, and on whom it was proclaimed that faithfulness (or as it is rendered in the Septuagint, by the same phrase which the Apostle here employs, 'in truth') was to be the girdle of his reins; but, at all events, that which the prophet saw to be in the ideal Messiah, the Apostle sees as essential to all the subjects of that King.

III. Our truthfulness is the work of God's truth.

We have already pointed out that the expression in the text may either be taken as referring to the subjective quality of truthfulness, or to the objective truth of God as contained in the Gospel, but these two

interpretations may be united, for the main factor in producing the former is the faithful use of the latter and an honest submission to its operation. The Psalmist of old had learned that the great safeguard against sin was the resolve, 'Thy word have I hid in my heart.' That word brings to bear the mightiest motives that can sway life. It moves by love, by fear, by hope: it proposes the loftiest aim, even to imitate God as dear children; it gives clear directions, and draws straight and plain the pilgrim's path; it holds out the largest promises, and in a measure fulfils them, even in the narrowest and most troubled lives. If we have made God's truth our own, and are faithfully applying it to the details of daily life and submitting our whole selves to its operation, we shall be truthful and shall instinctively shrink from all unreality. If we know the truth as it is in Jesus, and walk in it, that 'truth will make us free,' and if thus 'we are in Him that is true, even in His Son, Jesus Christ,' that truth abiding in us, and with us, for ever, will make us truthful. In a heart so occupied and filled there is no room for the make-believes which are but too apt to creep into religious experience. Such a soul will recoil with an instinct of abhorrence from all that savours of ostentation, and will feel that its truest treasure cannot be shown. It is our duty not to hide God's righteousness within our hearts, but it is equally our duty to hide His word there. We have to seek to make manifest the 'savour of His knowledge in every place,' but we have also to remember that in our hearts there is a secret place, and that 'not easily forgiven are they who draw back the curtains,' and let a careless world look in. It is not for others to pry into the hidden mysteries of the fellowship of a soul with the indwelling Christ,

however it may be the Christian duty to show to all and sundry the blessed and transforming effects of that fellowship.

But God's truth must be received and its power submitted to, if it is to implant in us the supreme grace of perfect truthfulness. Our minds and hearts must be saturated with it by many an hour of solitary reflection, by meditation which will diffuse its aroma like a fragrant perfume through our characters, and by the habit of bringing all circumstances, moods, and desires to be tested by its infallible criterion, and by the unreluctant acceptance of its guidance at every moment of our lives. There are many of us who, in a real though terribly imperfect sense, hold the truth, but who know nothing, or next to nothing, of its power to make us truthful. If it is to be of any use to us, we must make it ours in a far deeper sense than it is ours now; for many of us the girdle has been but carelessly fastened and has worked loose, and because, by our own faults, we have not 'abode in the truth,' it has come to pass that there is 'no truth in us.' We have set before us in the text the one condition on which all Christian progress depends, and if by any slackness we loosen the girdle of truthfulness, and admit into our religious life any taint of unreality, if our prayers say just a little more than is quite true, and our penitence a little less, we shall speedily find that hypocrisy and trivial insincerity are separated by very narrow limits. God's truth in the Gospel cleanses the inner man, but not without his own effort, and, therefore, we are commanded to 'cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness, in the fear of the Lord.'

'THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS'

'Having put on the breastplate of righteousness.'—EPH. vi. 14.

THERE can be no doubt that in this whole context the Apostle has in mind the great passage in Isaiah lix. where the prophet, in a figure of extreme boldness, describes the Lord as arming Himself to deliver the oppressed faithful, and coming as a Redeemer to Zion. In that passage the Lord puts on righteousness as a breastplate—that is to say, God, in His manifestation of Himself for the deliverance of His people, comes forth as if arrayed in the glittering armour of righteousness. Paul does not shrink from applying the same metaphor to those who are to be 'imitators of God as beloved children,' and from urging upon them that, in their humble degree and lowly measure, they too are to be clothed in the bright armour of moral rectitude. This righteousness is manifested in character and in conduct, and as the breastplate guards the vital organs from assault, it will keep the heart unwounded.

We must note that Paul here gathers up the whole sum of Christian character and conduct into one word. All can be expressed, however diversified may be the manifestations, by the one sovereign term 'righteousness,' and that is not merely a hasty generalisation, or a too rapid synthesis. As all sin has one root and is generically one, so all goodness is at bottom one. The germ of sin is living to oneself: the germ of goodness is living to God. Though the degrees of development of either opposite are infinite, and the forms of its expression innumerable, yet the root of each is one.

Paul thinks of righteousness as existent before the

Christian soldier puts it on. In this thought we are not merely relying on the metaphor of our text, but bringing it into accord with the whole tone of New Testament teaching, which knows of only one way in which any soul that has been living to self, and therefore to sin, can attain to living to God, and therefore can be righteous. We must receive, if we are ever to possess, the righteousness which is of God, and which becomes ours through Jesus Christ. The righteousness which shines as a fair but unattainable vision before sinful men, has a real existence, and may be theirs. It is not to be self-elaborated, but to be received.

That existent righteousness is to be put on. Other places of Scripture figure it as the robe of righteousness; here it is conceived of as the breastplate, but the idea of assumption is the same. It is to be put on, primarily, by faith. It is given in Christ to simple belief. He that hath faith thereby has the righteousness which is through faith in Christ, for in his faith he has the one formative principle of reliance on God, which will gradually refine character and mould conduct into whatsoever things are lovely and of good report. That righteousness which faith receives is no mere forensic treating of the unjust as just, but whilst it does bring with it pardon and oblivion from past transgressions, it makes a man in the depths of his being righteous, however slowly it may afterwards transform his conduct. The faith which is a departure from all reliance on works of righteousness which we have done, and is a single-eyed reliance on the work of Jesus Christ, opens the heart in which it is planted to all the influences of that life which was in Jesus, that from Him it may be in us. If Christ be in us (and if He is not, we are none of His), 'the spirit is life because

of righteousness,' however the body may still be 'dead because of sin.'

But the putting on of the breastplate requires effort as well as faith, and effort will be vigorous in the measure in which faith is vivid, but it should follow, not precede or supplant, faith. There is no more hopeless and weary advice than would be the exhortation of our text if it stood alone. It is a counsel of despair to tell a man to put on that breastplate, and to leave him in doubt where he is to find it, or whether he has to hammer it together by his own efforts before he can put it on. There is no more unprofitable expenditure of breath than the cry to men, Be good! Be good! Moral teaching without Gospel preaching is little better than a waste of breath.

This injunction is continuously imperative upon all Christian soldiers. They are on the march through the enemy's country, and can never safely lay aside their armour. After all successes, and no less after all failures, we have still to arm ourselves for the fight, and it is to be remembered that the righteousness of which Paul speaks differs from common earthly moralities only as including and transcending them all. It is, alas, too true that Christian righteousness has been by Christians set forth as something fantastic and unreal, remote from ordinary life, and far too heavenly-minded to care for common virtues. Let us never forget that Jesus Himself has warned us, that except our righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, we shall in no wise enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The greater orbit encloses the lesser within itself.

The breastplate of righteousness is our defence against evil. The opposition to temptation is best

carried on by the positive cultivation of good. A habit of righteous conduct is itself a defence against temptation. Untilled fields bear abundant weeds. The used tool does not rust, nor the running water gather scum. The robe of righteousness will guard the heart as effectually as a coat of mail. The positive employment with good weakens temptation, and arms us against evil. But so long as we are here our righteousness must be militant, and we must be content to live ever armed to meet the enemy which is always hanging round us, and watching for an opportunity to strike. The time will come when we shall put off the breastplate and put on the fine linen 'clean and white,' which is the heavenly and final form of the righteousness of Saints.

A SOLDIER'S SHOES

'Your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.'—EPH. vi. 15.

PAUL drew the first draft of this picture of the Christian armour in his first letter. It is a finished picture here. One can fancy that the Roman soldier to whom he was chained in his captivity, whilst this letter was being written, unconsciously sat for his likeness, and that each piece of his accoutrements was seized in succession by the Apostle's imagination and turned to a Christian use. It is worth noticing that there is only one offensive weapon mentioned—'the sword of the Spirit.' All the rest are defensive—helmet, breastplate, shield, girdle, and shoes. That is to say, the main part of our warfare consists in defence, in resistance, and in keeping what we have, in spite of everybody, men and devils, who attempt to take it from us. 'Hold fast that thou hast; let no man take thy crown.'

Now, it seems to me that the ordinary reader does not quite grasp the meaning of our text, and that it would be more intelligible if, instead of 'preparation,' which means the process of getting a thing ready, we read 'preparedness,' which means the state of mind of the man who is ready. Then we have to notice that the little word 'of' does duty to express two different relations, in the two instances of its use here. In the first case—'the preparedness of the Gospel'—it states the origin of the thing in question. That condition of being ready comes from the good news of Christ. In the second case—'the Gospel of peace'—it states the result of the thing in question. The good news of Christ gives peace. So, taking the whole clause, we may paraphrase it by saying that the preparedness of spirit, the alacrity which comes from the possession of a Gospel that sheds a calm over the heart and brings a man into peace with God, is what the Apostle thinks is like the heavy hob-nailed boots that the legionaries wore, by which they could stand firm, whatever came against them.

I. The first thing that I would notice here is that the Gospel brings peace.

I suppose that there was ringing in Paul's head some echoes of the music of Isaiah's words, 'How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of Him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace, that bringeth good tidings of good!' But there is a great deal more than an unconscious quotation of ancient words here; for in Paul's thought, the one power which brings a man into harmony with the universe and to peace with himself, is the power which proclaims that God is at peace with him. And Jesus Christ is our peace, because He has swept away the root and bitter fountain of all the

disquiet of men's hearts, and all their chafing at providences—the consciousness that there is discord between themselves and God. The Gospel brings peace in the deepest sense of that word, and, primarily, peace with God, from out of which all other kinds of tranquillity and heart-repose do come—and they come from nothing besides.

But what strikes me most here is not so much the allusion to the blessed truth that was believed and experienced by these Ephesian Christians, that the Gospel brought peace, and was the only thing that did, as the singular emergence of that idea that the Gospel was a peace-bringing power, in the midst of this picture of fighting. Yes, it brings both. It brings us peace first, and then it says to us, 'Now, having got peace in your heart, because peace with God, go out and fight to keep it.' For, if we are warring with the devil we are at peace with God; and if we are at peace with the devil we are warring with God. So the two states of peace and war go together. There is no real peace which has not conflict in it, and the Gospel is 'the Gospel of peace,' precisely because it enlists us in Christ's army and sends us out to fight Christ's battles.

So, then, dear brother, the only way to realise and preserve 'the peace of God which passes understanding' is to fling ourselves manfully into the fight to which all Christ's soldiers are pledged and bound. The two conditions, though they seem to be opposite, will unite; for this is the paradox of the Christian life, that in all regions it makes compatible apparently incompatible and contradictory emotions. 'As sorrowful'—and Paul might have said 'therefore' instead of 'yet'—'as sorrowful yet always rejoicing; as having nothing yet'—therefore—'possessing all things'; as in the thick

of the fight, and yet kept in perfect peace, because the soul is stayed on God. The peace that comes from friendship with Him, the peace that fills a heart tranquil because satisfied, the peace that soothes a conscience emptied of all poison and robbed of all its sting, the peace that abides because, on all the horizon in front of us nothing can be seen that we need to be afraid of—that peace is the peace which the Gospel brings, and it is realised in warfare and is consistent with it. All the armies of the world may camp round the fortress, and the hurtling noise of battle may be loud in the plains, but up upon the impregnable cliff crowned by its battlements there is a central citadel, with a chapel in the heart of it; and to the worshippers there none of the noise ever penetrates. The Gospel which laps us in peace and puts it in our hearts makes us soldiers.

II. Further, this Gospel of peace will prepare us for the march.

A wise general looks after his soldiers' boots. If they give out, nothing else is of much use. The roads are very rough and very long, and there need to be strong soles and well-sewed uppers, and they will be none the worse for a bit of iron on the heels and the toes, in order that they may not wear out in the midst of the campaign. 'Thy shoes shall be iron and brass,' and these metals are harder than any of the rock that you will have to clamber over. Which being translated into plain fact is just this—a tranquil heart in amity with God is ready for all the road, is likely to make progress, and is fit for anything that it may be called to do.

A calm heart makes a light foot; and he who is living at peace with God, and with all disturbance within

hushed to rest, will, for one thing, be able to see what his duty is. He will see his way as far as is needful for the moment. That is more than a good many of us can do when our eyes get confused, because our hearts are beating so loudly and fast, and our own wishes come in to hide from us God's will. But if we are weaned from ourselves, as we shall be if we are living in possession of the peace of God which passes understanding, the atmosphere will be transparent, as it is on some of the calm last days of autumn, and we shall see far ahead and know where we ought to go.

The quiet heart will be able to fling its whole strength into its work. And that is what troubled hearts never can do, for half their energy is taken up in steadying or quieting themselves, or is dissipated in going after a hundred other things. But when we are wholly engaged in quiet fellowship with Jesus Christ we have the whole of our energies at our command, and can fling ourselves wholly into our work for Him. The steam-engine is said to be a very imperfect machine which wastes more power than it utilises. That is true of a great many Christian people; they have the power, but they are so far away from that deep sense of tranquillity with God, of which my text speaks, that they waste much of the power that they have. And if we are to have for our motto 'Always Ready,' as an old Scottish family has, the only way to secure that is by having 'our feet shod with the preparedness' that comes from the Gospel that brings us peace. Brethren, duty that is done reluctantly, with hesitation, is not done. We must fling ourselves into the work gladly and be always 'ready for all Thy perfect will.'

There was an English commander, who died some years ago, who was sent for to the Horse Guards one

day and asked, 'How long will it take for you to be ready to go to Scinde?' 'Half an hour,' said he; and in three-quarters he was in the train, on his road to reconquer a kingdom. That is how we ought to be; but we never shall be, unless we live habitually in tranquil communion with God, and in the full faith that we are at peace with Him through the blood of His Son. A quiet heart makes us ready for duty.

III. Again, the Gospel of peace prepares us for combat.

In ancient warfare battles were lost or won very largely according to the weight of the masses of men that were hurled against each other; and the heavier men, with the firmer footing, were likely to be the victors. Our modern scientific way of fighting is different from that. But in the old time the one thing needful was that a man should stand firm and resist the shock of the enemies as they rushed upon him. Unless our footing is good we shall be tumbled over by the onset of some unexpected antagonist. And for good footing there are two things necessary. One is a good, solid piece of ground to stand on, that is not slippery nor muddy, and the other is a good, strong pair of soldier's boots, that will take hold on the ground and help the wearer to steady himself. Christ has set our feet on the rock, and so the first requisite is secured. If we, for our part, will keep near to that Gospel which brings peace into our hearts, the peace that it brings will make us able to stand and bear unmoved any force that may be hurled against us. If we are to be 'steadfast, unmovable,' we can only be so when our feet are shod with the preparedness of the Gospel of peace.

The most of your temptations, most of the things that would pluck you away from Jesus Christ, and upset you in your standing will come down upon you unexpectedly. Nothing happens in this world except the unexpected; and it is the sudden assaults that we were not looking for that work most disastrously against us. A man may be aware of some special weakness in his character, and have given himself carefully and patiently to try to fortify himself against it, and, lo! all at once a temptation springs up from the opposite side; the enemy was lying in hiding there, and whilst his face was turned to fight with one foe, a foe that he knew nothing about came storming behind him. There is only one way to stand, and that is not merely by cultivating careful watchfulness against our own weaknesses, but by keeping fast hold of Jesus Christ manifested to us in His Gospel. Then the peace that comes from that communion will itself guard us.

You remember what Paul says in one of his other letters, where he has the same beautiful blending together of the two ideas of peace and warfare: 'The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall garrison your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.' It will be, as it were, an armed force within your heart which will repel all antagonism, and will enable you to abide in that Christ, through whom and in whom alone all peace comes. So, because we are thus liable to be overwhelmed by a sudden rush of unexpected temptation, and surprised into a sin before we know where we are, let us keep fast hold by that Gospel which brings peace, which will give us steadfastness, however suddenly the masked battery may begin to play upon us, and the foe may steal out of his ambush and make a rush against our unprotectedness. That is the only

way, as I think, by which we can walk scatheless through the world.

Now, dear brethren, remember that this text is part of a commandment. We are to put on the shoes. How is that to be done? By a very simple way: a way which, I am afraid, a great many Christian people do not practise with anything like the constancy that they ought. For it is the Gospel that brings the peace, and if its peace brings the preparedness, then the way to get the preparedness is by soaking our minds and hearts in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

You hear a good deal nowadays about deepening the spiritual life, and people hold conventions for the purpose. All right; I have not a word to say against that. But, conventions or no conventions, there is only one thing that deepens the spiritual life, and that is keeping near the Christ from whom all the fulness of the spiritual life flows. If we will hold fast by our Gospel, and let its peace lie upon our minds, as the negative of a photograph lies upon the paper that it is to be printed upon, until the image of Jesus Christ Himself is reproduced in us, then we may laugh at temptation. For there will be no temptation when the heart is full of Him, and there will be no sense of surrendering anything that we wish to keep when the superior sweetness of His grace fills our souls. It is empty vessels into which poison can be poured. If the vessel is full there will be no room for it. Get your hearts and minds filled with the wine of the kingdom, and the devil's venom of temptation will have no space to get in. It is well to resist temptation; it is better to be lifted above it, so that it ceases to tempt. And the one way to secure that is to live near Jesus Christ, and let the Gospel of His grace take up

more of our thoughts and more of our affections than it has done in the past. Then we shall realise the fulfilment of the promise: 'He will not suffer thy foot to be moved.'

THE SHIELD OF FAITH

'Above all, taking the shield of faith, whereby ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.'—EPH. vi. 16.

THERE were two kinds of shields in use in ancient warfare—one smaller, carried upon the arm, and which could be used, by a movement of the arm, for the defence of threatened parts of the body in detail; the other large, planted in front of the soldier, fixed in the ground, and all but covering his whole person. It is the latter which is referred to in the text, as the word which describes it clearly shows. That word is connected with the Greek word meaning 'door,' and gives a rough notion of the look of the instrument of defence—a great rectangular oblong, behind which a man could stand untouched and untouchable. And that is the kind of shield, says Paul, which we are to have—no little defence which may protect some part of the nature, but a great wall, behind which he who crouches is safe.

'Above all' does not mean here, as superficial readers take it to mean, most especially and primarily, as most important, but it simply means *in addition to* all these other things. Perhaps with some allusion to the fact that the shield protected the breastplate, as well as the breastplate protected the man, there may be a reference to the kind of double defence which comes

to him who wears that breastplate and lies behind the shelter of a strong and resolute faith.

I. Now, looking at this metaphor from a practical point of view, the first thing to note is the missiles, 'the fiery darts of the wicked.'

Archæologists tell us that there were in use in ancient warfare javelins tipped with some kind of combustible, which were set on fire, and flung, so that they had not only the power of wounding but also of burning; and that there were others with a hollow head, which was in like manner filled, kindled, and thrown into the ranks of the enemy. I suppose that the Apostle's reason for specifying these fiery darts was simply that they were the most formidable offensive weapons that he had ever heard of. Probably, if he had lived to-day, he would have spoken of rifle-bullets or explosive shells, instead of fiery darts. But, though probably the Apostle had no further meaning in the metaphor than to suggest that faith was mightier than the mightiest assaults that can be hurled against it, we may venture to draw attention to two particulars in which this figure is specially instructive and warning. The one is the action of certain temptations in setting the soul on fire; the other is the suddenness with which they assail us.

'The fiery darts.' Now, I do not wish to confine that metaphor too narrowly to any one department of human nature, for our whole being is capable of being set on fire, and 'set on fire of hell,' as James says. But there are things in us all to which the fiery darts do especially appeal: desires, appetites, passions; or—to use the word which refined people are so afraid of, although the Bible is not, '*lusts*—which war against the soul,' and which need only a touch of fire to flare

up like a tar-barrel, in thick foul smoke darkening the heavens. There are fiery darts that strike these animal natures of ours, and set them all aflame.

But, there are other fiery darts than these. There are plenty of other desires in us: wishes, cowardices, weaknesses of all sorts, that, once touched with the devil's dart, will burn fiercely enough. We all know that.

Then there is the other characteristic of suddenness. The dart comes without any warning. The arrow is invisible until it is buried in the man's breast. The pestilence walks in darkness, and the victim does not know until its poison fang is in him. Ah! yes! brethren, the most dangerous of our temptations are those that are sprung upon us unawares. We are going quietly along the course of our daily lives, occupied with quite other thoughts, and all at once, as if a door had opened, not out of heaven but out of hell, we are confronted with some evil thing that, unless we are instantaneously on our guard, will conquer us almost before we know. Evil tempts us because it comes to us, for the most part, without any beat of drum or blast of trumpet to say that it is coming, and to put us upon our guard. The batteries that do most harm to the advancing force are masked until the word of command is given, and then there is a flash from every cannon's throat and a withering hail of shot that confounds by its unexpectedness as well as kills by its blow. The fiery darts that light up the infernal furnace in a man's heart, and that smite him all unawares and unsuspecting, these are the weapons that we have to fear most.

II. Consider next, the defence: 'the shield of faith.'

Now, the Old Testament says things like this: 'Fear not, Abraham; I am thy Shield.' The psalmist invoked

God, in a rapturous exuberance of adoring invocations, as his fortress, and his buckler, and the horn of his salvation, and his high tower. The same psalm says, 'The Lord is a shield to all them that put their trust in Him'; and the Book of Proverbs, which is not given to quoting psalms, quotes that verse. Another psalm says, 'The Lord God is a sun and shield.'

And then Paul comes speaking of 'the shield of *faith*.' What has become of the other one? The answer is plain enough. My faith is nothing except for what it puts in front of me, and it is God who is truly my shield; my faith is only called a shield, because it brings me behind the bosses of the Almighty's buckler, against which no man can run a tilt, or into which no man can strike his lance, nor any devil either. God is a defence; and my trust, which is nothing in itself, is everything because of that with which it brings me into connection. Faith is the condition, and the only condition, of God's power flowing into me, and working in me. And when that power flows into me, and works in me, then I can laugh at the fiery darts, because 'greater is He that is with us than all they that are with them.'

So all the glorification which the New Testament pours out upon the act of faith properly belongs, not to the act itself, but to that with which the act brings us into connection. Wherefore, in the first Epistle of John, the Apostle, who recorded Christ's saying, 'Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world,' translates it into, 'This is the victory that overcometh the world'—*not*, our Christ, but—'even our faith.' And it overcomes because it binds us in deep, vital union with Him who has overcome; and then all His conquering power comes into us.

That is the explanation and vindication of the turn which Paul gives to the Old Testament metaphor here, when he makes our shield to be faith. Suppose a man was exercising trust in one that was unworthy of it, would that trust defend him from anything? Suppose you were in peril of some great pecuniary loss, and were saying to yourself, 'Oh! I do not care. So-and-so has guaranteed me against any loss, and I trust to him,' and suppose he was a bankrupt, what would be the good of your trust? It would not bring the money back into your pocket. Suppose a man is leaning upon a rotten support; the harder he leans the sooner it will crumble. So there is no defence in the act of trust except what comes into it from the object of trust; and my faith is a shield only because it grasps the God who is the shield.

But, then, there is another side to that thought. My faith will quench, as nothing else will, these sudden impulses of fiery desires, because my faith brings me into the conscious presence of God, and of the unseen realities where He dwells. How can a man sin when God's eye is felt to be upon him? Suppose conspirators plotting some dark deed in a corner, shrouded by the night, as they think; and suppose, all at once, the day were to blaze in upon them, they would scatter, and drop their designs. Faith draws back the curtain which screens off that unseen world from so many of us, and lets in the light that shines down from above and shows us that we are compassed about by a cloud of witnesses, and the Captain of our Salvation in the midst of them. Then the fiery darts fizzle out, and the points drop off them. No temptation continues to flame when we see God.

They have contrivances in mills that they call 'auto-

matic sprinklers.' When the fire touches them it melts away a covering, and a gas is set free that puts the fire out. And if we let in the thought of God, it will extinguish any flame. 'The sun puts out the fire in our grates,' the old women say. Let God's sun shine into your heart, and you will find that the infernal light has gone out. The shield of faith quenches the fiery darts of the 'wicked.'

Yes! and it does it in another way. For, according to the Epistle to the Hebrews, faith realises 'the things hoped for,' as well as 'unseen.' And if a man is walking in the light of the great promises of Heaven, and the great threatenings of a hell, he will not be in much danger of being set on fire, even by 'the fiery darts of the wicked.' He that receives into his heart God's strength; he that by faith is conscious of the divine presence in communion with him; he that by faith walks in the light of eternal retribution, will triumph over the most sudden, the sharpest, and the most fiery of the darts that can be launched against him.

III. The Grasp of the Shield.

'*Taking the shield,*' then, there is something to be done in order to get the benefit of that defence. Now, there are a great many very good people at present who tell Christian men that they ought to exercise faith for sanctifying, as they exercise it for justifying and acceptance. And some of them—I do not say all—forget that there is effort needed to exercise faith for sanctifying; and that our energy has to be put forth in order that a man may, in spite of all resistance, keep himself in the attitude of dependence. So my text, whilst it proclaims that we are to trust for defence against, and victory over, recurring tempta-

tions, just as we trusted for forgiveness and acceptance at the beginning, proclaims also that there must be effort to grasp the shield, and to realise the defence which the shield gives to us.

For to trust is an act of the heart and will far more than of the head, and there are a great many hindrances that rise in the way of it; and to keep behind the shield, and not depend at all upon our own wit, our wisdom, or our strength, but wholly upon the Christ who gives us wit and wisdom, and strengthens our fingers to fight—that will take work! To occupy heart and mind with the object of faith is not an easy thing.

So, brethren, effort to compel the will and the heart to trust; effort to keep the mind in touch with the verities and the Person who are the objects of our faith; and effort to keep ourselves utterly and wholly ensconced behind the Shield, and never to venture out into the open, where our own arm has to keep our own heads, but to hang wholly upon Him—these things go to 'taking' the shield of faith. And it is because we fail in these, and not because there are any holes or weak places in the shield, that so many of the fiery darts find their way through, and set on fire and wound us. The Shield is impregnable, beaten as we have often been. 'This is the victory that overcometh the world'—and the devil and his darts—'even our faith.'

'THE HELMET OF SALVATION'

'Take the helmet of salvation.'—Eph. vi. 17.

WE may, perhaps, trace a certain progress in the enumeration of the various pieces of the Christian armour in this context. Roughly speaking, they are

in three divisions. There are first our graces of truth, righteousness, preparedness, which, though they are all conceived as given by God, are yet the exercises of our own powers. There is next, standing alone, as befits its all-comprehensive character, faith which is able to ward against and overcome not merely this and that temptation, but all forms of evil. That faith is the root of the three preceding graces, and makes the transition to the two which follow, because it is the hand by which we lay hold of God's gifts. The two final parts of the Christian armour are God's gifts, pure and simple—salvation and the word of God. So the progress is from circumference to centre, from man to God. From the central faith we have on the one hand that which it produces in us; on the other, that which it lays hold of from God. And these two last pieces of armour, being wholly God's gift, we are bidden with especial emphasis which is shown by a change in construction, to take or receive these.

I. The Salvation.

Once more Old Testament prophecy suggests the words of this exhortation. In Isaiah's grand vision of God, arising to execute judgment which is also redemption, we have a wonderful picture of His arraying Himself in armour. Righteousness is His flashing breastplate: on His head is an helmet of salvation. The gleaming steel is draped by garments of retributive judgment, and over all is cast, like a cloak, the ample folds of that 'zeal' which expresses the inexhaustible energy and intensity of the divine nature and action. Thus arrayed He comes forth to avenge and save. His redeeming work is the manifestation and issue of all these characteristics of His nature. It flames with divine fervour: it manifests the justice which repays,

but its inmost character is righteousness, and its chief purpose is to save. His helmet is salvation; the plain, prose meaning of which would appear to be that His great purpose of saving men is its own guarantee that His purpose should be effected, and is the armour by which His work is defended.

The Apostle uses the old picture with perfect freedom, quoting the words indeed, but employing them quite differently. God's helmet of salvation is His own purpose; man's helmet of salvation is God's gift. He is strong to save because He wills to save; we are strong and safe when we take the salvation which He gives.

It is to be further noticed that the same image appears in Paul's rough draft of the Christian armour in Thessalonians, with the significant difference that there the helmet is 'the hope of salvation,' and here it is the salvation itself. This double representation is in full accord with all Scripture teaching, according to which we both possess and hope for salvation, and our possession determines the measure of our hope. That great word negatively implies deliverance from evil of any kind, and in its lower application, from sickness or peril of any sort. In its higher meaning in Scripture the evil from which we are saved is most frequently left unexpressed, but sometimes a little glimpse is given, as when we read that 'we are saved from wrath through Him,' or 'saved from sin.' What Christ saves us from is, first and chiefly, from sin in all aspects, its guilt, its power, and its penalty; but His salvation reaches much further than any mere deliverance from threatening evil, and positively means the communication to our weakness and emptiness of all blessings and graces possible for men. It is inward and properly spiritual, but it is also outward, and it is not fully

possessed until we are clothed with 'salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.'

Hence, in Scripture our salvation is presented as past, as present, and as future. As past it is once for all received by initial faith in Christ; and, in view of their faith, Paul has no scruples as to saying to the imperfect Christians whose imperfections he scourges, 'Ye have been saved,' or in building upon that past fact his earnest exhortations and his scathing rebukes. The salvation is present if in any true sense it is past. There will be a daily growing deliverance from evil and a daily growing appropriation and manifestation of the salvation which we have received. And so Paul more than once speaks of Christians as 'being saved.' The process begun in the past is continued throughout the present, and the more a Christian man is conscious of its reality even amidst flaws, failures, stagnation, and lapses, the more assured will be his hope of the perfect salvation in the future, when all that is here, tendency often thwarted, and aspirations often balked, and sometimes sadly contradicted, will be completely, uninterruptedly, and eternally realised. If that hope flickers and is sometimes all but dead, the reason mainly lies in its flame not being fed by present experience.

II. The helmet of salvation.

This salvation in its present form will keep our heads in the day of battle. Its very characteristic is that it delivers us from evil, and all the graces with which Paul equips his ideal warrior are parts of the positive blessings which our salvation brings us. The more assured we are in our own happy consciousness of possessing the salvation of God, the more shall we be defended from all the temptations that seek to stir into action our lower selves. There will be no power in our

fears to draw us into sin, and the possible evils that appeal to earthly passions of whatever sort will lose their power to disturb us, in the precise measure in which we know that we are saved in Christ. The consciousness of salvation will tend to damp down the magazine of combustibles that we all carry within us, and the sparks that fall will be as innocuous as those that light on wet gunpowder. If our thoughts are occupied with the blessings which we possess they will be guarded against the assaults of evil. The full cup has no room for poison. The eye that is gazing on the far-off white mountains does not see the filth and frivolities around. If we are living in conscious possession and enjoyment of what God gives us, we shall pass scatheless through the temptations which would otherwise fall on us and rend us. A future eagerly longed for, and already possessed in germ, will kill a present that would otherwise appeal to us with irresistible force.

III. Take the helmet.

We might perhaps more accurately read *receive* salvation, for that salvation is not won by any efforts of our own, but if we ever possess it, our possession is the result of our accepting it as a gift from God. The first word which the Gospel speaks to men and which makes it a Gospel, is not Do this or that, but Take this from the hands that were nailed to the Cross. The beginning of all true life, of all peace, of all self-control, of all hope, lies in the humble and penitent acceptance by faith of the salvation which Christ brings, and with which we have nothing to do but to accept it.

But Paul is here speaking to those whom he believes to have already exercised the initial faith which united them to Christ, and made His salvation theirs, and to

these the exhortation comes with special force. To such it says, 'See to it that your faith ever grasps and feeds upon the great facts on which your salvation reposes—God's changeless love, Christ's all-sufficient sacrifice and ascended life, which He imparts to us if we abide in Him. Hold fast and prolong by continual repetition the initial act by which you received that salvation. It is said that on his death-bed Oliver Cromwell asked the Puritan divine who was standing by it whether a man who had once been in the covenant could be lost, and on being assured that he could not, answered, 'I know that I was once in it'; but such a building on past experiences is a building on sand, and nothing but continuous faith will secure a continuous salvation. A melancholy number of so-called Christians in this day have to travel far back through the years before they reach the period when they took the helmet of salvation. They know that they were far better men, and possessed a far deeper apprehension of Christ and His power in the old days than is theirs now, and they need not wonder if God's great gift has unnoticed slipped from their relaxed grasp. A hand that clings to a rock while a swollen flood rushes past needs to perpetually be tightening its grip, else the man will be swept away; and the present salvation, and, still more, the hope of a future salvation, are not ours on any other terms than a continual repetition of the initial act by which we first received them. But there must also be a continually increased appropriation and manifestation in our lives of a progressive salvation that will come as a result of a constantly renewed faith; but it will not come unless there be continuous effort to work into our characters, and to work out in our lives, the transforming and vitalising power of the life given to us in Jesus

Christ. If our present experience yields no sign of growing conformity to the image of our Saviour, there is only too abundant reason for doubting whether we have experienced a past salvation or have any right to anticipate a perfect future salvation.

The last word to be said is, Live in frequent anticipation of that perfect future. If that anticipation is built on memory of the past and experience of the present, it cannot be too confident. That hope maketh not ashamed. In the region of Christian experience alone the weakest of us has a right to reckon on the future, and to be sure that when that great to-morrow dawns for us, it 'shall be as this day and much more abundant.' With this salvation in its imperfect form brightening the present, and in its completeness filling the future with unimaginable glory, we can go into all the conflicts of this fighting world and feel that we are safe because God covers our heads in the day of battle. Unless so defended we shall go into the fight as the naked Indians did with the Spanish invaders, and be defeated as they were. The plumes may be shorn off the helmet, and it may be easily dented, but the head that wore it will be unharmed. And when the battle and the noise of battle are past, the helmet will be laid aside, and we shall be able to say, 'I have fought a good fight, henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.'

'THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT'

'The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.'—EPH. vi. 17.

WE reach here the last and only offensive weapon in the panoply. The 'of' here does not indicate apposition, as in the 'shield of faith,' or 'the helmet of salva-

tion,' nor is it the 'of' of possession, so that the meaning is to be taken as being the sword which the Spirit wields, but it is the 'of' expressing origin, as in the 'armour of God'; it is the sword which the Spirit supplies. The progress noted in the last sermon from subjective graces to objective divine facts, is completed here, for the sword which is put into the Christian soldier's hand is the gift of God, even more markedly than is the helmet which guards his head in the day of battle.

I. Note what the word of God is.

The answer which would most commonly and almost unthinkingly be given is, I suppose, the Scriptures; but while this is on the whole true, it is to be noted that the expression employed here properly means a word spoken, and not the written record. Both in the Old and in the New Testaments the word of God means more than the Bible; it is the authentic utterance of His will in all shapes and applying to all the facts of His creation. In the Old Testament 'God said' is the expression in the first chapter of Genesis for the forth-putting of the divine energy in the act of creation, and long ages after that divine poem of creation was written a psalmist re-echoed the thought when he said 'For ever, O Lord, Thy word is settled in the heavens. Thou hast established the earth and it abideth.'

But, further, the expression designates the specific messages which prophets and others received. These are not in the Old Testament spoken of as a unity: they are individual words rather than a word. Each of them is a manifestation of the divine will and purpose; many of them are commandments; some of them are warnings; and all, in some measure, reveal the divine nature.

That self-revelation of God reaches for us in this life its permanent climax, when He who 'at sundry times and in divers manner spake unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by a Son.' Jesus is the personal 'word of God,' though that name by which He is designated in the New Testament is a different expression from that employed in our text, and connotes a whole series of different ideas.

The early Christian teachers and apostles had no hesitation in taking that sacred name—the word of the Lord—to describe the message which they spoke. One of their earliest prayers when they were left alone was, that with all boldness they might speak Thy word; and throughout the whole of the Acts of the Apostles the preached Gospel is designated as the word of God, even as Peter in his epistle quotes one of the noblest of the Old Testament sayings, and declares that the 'word of the Lord' which 'abideth for ever' is 'the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.'

Clearly, then, Paul here is exhorting the Ephesian Christians, most of whom probably were entirely ignorant of the Old Testament, to use the spoken words which they had heard from him and other preachers of the Gospel as the sword of the Spirit. Since he is evidently referring to Christian teaching, it is obvious that he regards the old and the new as one whole, that to him the proclamation of Jesus was the perfection of what had been spoken by prophets and psalmists. He claims for his message and his brethren's the same place and dignity that belonged to the former messengers of the divine will. He asserts, and all the more strongly, because it is an assertion by implication only, that the same Spirit which moved in the prophets and saints of former days is moving in the preachers

of the Gospel, and that their message has a wider sweep, a deeper content, and a more radiant light than that which had been delivered in the past. The word of the Lord had of old partially declared God's nature and His will: the word of God which Paul preached was in his judgment the complete revelation of God's loving heart, the complete exhibition to men of God's commandments of old; longing eyes had seen a coming day and been glad and confidently foretold it, now the message was 'the coming one has come.'

It is as the record and vehicle of that spoken Gospel, as well as of its earlier premonitions, that the Bible has come to be called the word of God, and the name is true in that He speaks in this book. But much harm has resulted from the appropriation of the name exclusively to the book, and the forgetfulness that a vehicle is one thing and that which it carries quite another.

II. The purpose and power of the word.

The sword is the only offensive weapon in the list. The spear which played so great a part in ancient warfare is not named. It may well be noted that only a couple of verses before our text we read of the Gospel of peace, and that here with remarkable freedom of use of his metaphors, Paul makes the word of God, which as we have seen is substantially equivalent to the preached Gospel, the one weapon with which Christian men are to cut and thrust. Jesus said 'I come not to send peace, but a sword,' but Paul makes the apparent contradiction still more acute when he makes the very Gospel itself the sword. We may recall as a parallel, and possibly a copy of our text, the great words of the Epistle to the Hebrews which speak of the word of God as 'living and active and sharper than any

two-edged sword.' And we cannot forget the magnificent symbolism of the Book of Revelation which saw in the midst of the candlestick one like unto a Son of Man, and 'out of His mouth proceeded a sharp, two-edged sword.' That image is the poetic embodiment of our Lord's own words which we have just quoted, and implies the penetrating power of the word which Christ's gentle lips have uttered. Gracious and healing as it is, a Gospel of peace, it has an edge and a point which cut down through all sophistications of human error, and lay bare the 'thoughts and intents of the heart.' The revelation made by Christ has other purposes which are not less important than its ministering of consolation and hope. It is intended to help us in our fight with evil, and the solemn old utterance, 'with the breath of His mouth He will slay the wicked,' is true in reference to the effect of the word of Christ on moral evil. Such slaying is but the other side of the life-giving power which the word exercises on a heart subject to its influence. For the Christian soldier's conflict with evil as threatening the health of his own Christian life, or as tyrannising over the lives of others, the sword of the Spirit is the best weapon.

We are not to take the rough-and-ready method, which is so common among good people, of identifying this spirit-given sword with the Bible. If for no other reason, yet because it is the Spirit which supplies it to the grasp of the Christian soldier, our possession of it is therefore a result of the action of that Spirit on the individual Christian spirit; and what He gives, and we are to wield, is 'the *engrafted* word which is able to save our souls.' That word, lodged in our hearts, brings to us a revelation of duty and a chart of life, because it brings a loving recognition of the character

of our Father, and a glad obedience to His will. If that word dwell in us richly, in all wisdom, and if we do not dull the edge of the sword by our own unworthy handling of it, we shall find it pierce to the 'dividing asunder of joints and marrow,' and the evil within us will either be cast out from us, or will shrivel itself up, and bury itself deep in dark corners.

Love to Christ will be so strong, and the things that are not seen will so overwhelmingly outweigh the things that are seen, that the solemn majesty of the eternal will make the temporal look to our awed eyes the contemptible unreality which it really is. They who humbly receive and faithfully use that engrafted word, have in it a sure touchstone against which their own sins and errors are shivered. It is for the Christian consciousness the true Ithuriel's spear, at the touch of which 'upstarts in his own shape the fiend' who has been pouring his whispered poison into an unsuspecting ear. The standard weights and measures are kept in government custody, and traders have to send their yard measures and scales thither if they wish them tested; but the engrafted word, faithfully used and submitted to, is always at hand, and ready to pronounce its decrees, and to cut to the quick the evil by which the understanding is darkened and conscience sophisticated.

III. The manner of its use.

Here that is briefly but sufficiently expressed by the one commandment, 'take,' or perhaps more accurately, 'receive.' Of course, properly speaking, that exhortation does not refer to our manner of fighting with the sword, but to the previous act by which our hand grasps it. But it is profoundly true that if we take it in the deepest sense, the possession of it will teach the

use of it. No instruction will impart the last, and little instruction is needed for the first. What is needed is the simple act of yielding ourselves to Jesus Christ, and looking to Him only, as our guide and strength. Before all Christian warfare must come the possession of the Christian armour, and the commandment that here lies at the beginning of all Paul's description of it is '*Take.*' Our fitness for the conflict all depends on our receiving God's gift, and that reception is no mere passive thing, as if God's grace could be poured into a human spirit as water is into a bucket. Hence, the translation of this commandment of Paul's by '*take*' is better than that by '*receive*,' inasmuch as it brings into prominence man's activity, though it gives too exclusive importance to that, to the detriment of the far deeper and more essential element of the divine action. The two words are, in fact, both needed to cover the whole ground of what takes place when the giving God and the taking man concur in the great act by which the Spirit of God takes up its abode in a human spirit. God's gift is to be received as purely His gift, undeserved, unearned by us. But undeserved and unearned as it is, and given '*without money and without price*,' it is not ours unless our hand is stretched out to take, and our fingers closed tightly over the free gift of God. There is a dead lift of effort in the reception; there is a still greater effort needed for the continued possession, and there is a life-long discipline and effort needed for the effective use in the struggle of daily life of the sword of the Spirit.

If that engrafted word is ever to become sovereign in our lives, there must be a life-long attempt to bring the tremendous truths as to God's will for human conduct which it plants in our minds into practice, and to

bring all our practice under their influence. The motives which it brings to bear on our evils will be powerless to smite them, unless these motives are made sovereign in us by many an hour of patient meditation and of submission to their sweet and strong constraint. One sometimes sees on a wild briar a graft which has been carefully inserted and bandaged up, but which has failed to strike, and so the strain of the briar goes on and no rosebuds come. Are there not some of us who profess to have received the engrafted word and whose daily experience has proved, by our own continual sinfulness, that it is unable to 'save our souls'?

There are in the Christian ranks some soldiers whose hands are too nerveless or too full of worldly trash to grasp the sword which they have received, much less to strike home with it at any of the evils that are devastating their own lives or darkening the world. The feebleness of the Christian conflict with evil, in all its forms, whether individual or social, whether intellectual or moral, whether heretical or grossly and frankly sensual, is mainly due to the feebleness with which the average professing Christians grasp the sword of the Spirit. When David asked the priests for weapons, and they told him that Goliath's sword was lying wrapt in a cloth behind the ephod, and that they had none other, he said, 'There is none like that, give it me.' If we are wise, we will take the sword that lies in the secret place, and, armed with it, we shall not need to fear in any day of battle.

We do well that we take heed to the word of God, 'as unto a lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawn,' when swords will be no more needed, and the Word will no longer shine in darkness but be the Light that makes the Sun needless for the brightness of the New Jerusalem.

PEACE, LOVE, AND FAITH

'Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith.'—EPH. vi. 23.

THE numerous personal greetings usually found at the close of Paul's letters are entirely absent from this Epistle. All which we have in their place is this entirely general good wish, and the still more general and wider one in the subsequent verse.

There is but one other of the Apostle's letters similarly devoid of personal messages, viz. the Epistle to the Galatians, and their absence there is sufficiently accounted for by the severe and stern tone of that letter. But it is very difficult to understand how they should not appear in a letter to a church with which the Apostle had such prolonged and cordial relations as he had with the church at Ephesus. And hence the absence of these personal greetings is a strong confirmation of the opinion that this Epistle was not originally addressed to the church at Ephesus, but was a kind of circular intended to go round the various churches in Asia Minor, and only sent first to that at Ephesus. That opinion is further confirmed by the fact known to many of you that in some good ancient manuscripts the words 'at Ephesus' are omitted from the first verse of the letter; which thus stands without any specific address.

Be that as it may, this trinity of inward graces is Paul's highest and best wish for his friends. He has no earthly prosperity to wish for them. His ambition soars higher than that; he desires for them peace, love, faith.

Now, will you take the lesson? There is no better test of a man than the things that he wishes for the

people that he loves most. He desires for them, of course, his own ideal of happiness. What do you desire most for those that are dearest to you? You parents, do you train up your children, for instance, so as to secure, or to do your best to secure, not outward prosperity, but these loftier gifts; and for yourselves, when you are forming your wishes, are these the things that you want most? 'Set your affections on things above,' and remember that whoso has that trinity of graces, peace, love, faith, is rich and blessed, whatsoever else he has or needs. And whoso has them not is miserable and poor.

But I wish especially to look a little more closely at these three things in themselves and in their relation to one another. I take it that the Apostle is here tracking the stream to its fountain; that he is beginning with effects and working backwards and downwards to causes; so that to get the order of nature and of time we must reverse the order here, and begin where he ends and end where he begins. The Christian life in its higher vigour and excellence is rooted in faith. That faith associates to itself, and is inseparably connected with love, and the faith and love together issue in a deep restful tranquillity which nothing can break.

Now let us look at these three things as the three greatest blessings that any can bear in their hearts, and wring out of time, sorrow, and change.

I. First, the root of everything is a continuous and growing trust.

Remember that this prayer or wish of my text was spoken in reference to brethren; that is to say, to those who, by the hypothesis, already possessed Christian faith. And Paul wishes for them, and can wish

for them, nothing better and more than the increase and continuousness of that which they already possess. The highest blessing that the brethren can receive is the enlargement and the strengthening of their faith.

Now we talk so much in Christian teaching about this 'faith' that, I fancy, like a worn sixpence in a man's pocket, its very circulation from hand to hand has worn off the lettering. And many of us, from the very familiarity of the word, have only a dim conception of what it means. It may not be profitless, then, to remind you, first of all, that this faith is neither more nor less than a very familiar thing which you are constantly exercising in reference to one another—that is to say, simple confidence. You trust your husband, your wife, your child, your parent, your friend, your guide, your lawyer, your doctor, your banker. Take that very same emotion and attitude of the mind by which you put your well-being, in different aspects and provinces, into the hands of men and women round about you; lift the trailing flowers that go all straggling along the ground, and twine them round the pillars of God's throne, and you get the confidence, the trust, of the praises and glories of which the New Testament is full. There is nothing mysterious in it, it is simply the exercise of confidence, the familiar cement that binds all human relationship together, and makes men brotherly and kindred with their kind. Faith is trust, and trust saves a man's soul.

Then, remember further that the faith which is the foundation of everything is essentially personal trust reposing upon a person, upon Jesus Christ. You cannot get hold of a man in any other way than by that. The only real bond that binds people together is the personal bond of confidence, manifesting itself in

love. And it is no mere doctrine that we present for a man's faith, but it is the person about whom the doctrine speaks. We say, indeed, that we can only know the person on whom we must trust by the revelation of the truths concerning Him which make the Christian doctrines; but a man may believe the whole of them, and have no faith. And what is the step in advance which is needed in order to turn credence into faith—belief in a doctrine into trust? In one view it is the step from the doctrine to the person. When you grasp Christ, the living Christ, and not merely the doctrine, for yours, then you have faith.

Only remember, my brother, if you say you trust Christ, the question has immediately to be asked: What Christ is it that you are trusting? Is it the Christ that died for your sins on the Cross, or is it a Christ that taught you some great moral truths and set you a lovely example of life and conduct? Which of the two is it? for these two Christs are very different, and the faith that grasps the one is extremely unlike the faith that grasps the other. And so I press upon you this question: What Christ is it to Whom your confidence turns, and for what is it that you are looking to Him? Is it for help and guidance of some vague kind; is it for pattern or example, or is it for the salvation of your sinful souls, by the might of His great sacrifice?

Then, remember still further, that this personal outgoing of confidence, which is the action both of a man's will and of a man's intellect, to the person revealed to us in the great doctrines of the Gospel—that this faith, if it is to be worth anything, must be continuous. Paul could desire nothing better for his Ephesian friends than that they should have that which they had—faith;

that they should continue to have it, and that it should be perennial and increasing all through their lives. You can no more get present good from past faith than the breath you drew yesterday into your lungs will be sufficient to oxygenate your blood at this moment. As soon as you break the electric contact, the electric light goes out, and no matter how long a man has been living a life of faith, that past life will not in the smallest degree help him at the present moment unless the faith is continuous. Remember this, then, a broken faith is a broken peace; a broken faith is a broken salvation; and so long, and only so long, as you are knit to Jesus Christ by the conscious exercise of a faith realised at the moment, are you in the reception of blessing from Him at the moment.

And, still further, this faith ought to be progressive. So Paul desired it to be with these people. If there is no growth, do you think there is much life? I know I am speaking to plenty of people who call themselves Christians, whose faith is not one inch better to-day than it was when it was born—perhaps a little less rather than more. Oh! the hundreds and thousands of professing Christians, average Christians, that clog and weaken all churches, whose faith has no progressive element in it, and is not a bit stronger by all the discipline of life and by their experience of its power. Brethren! is it so with us? Let us ask ourselves that; and let us ask very solemnly this other question: If my faith has no growth, how do I know that it has got any life?

And so let me remind you further that this faith, the personal outgoing of a man's intellect and will to the personal Saviour revealed in the Scriptures as the sacrifice for our sins, and the life of our spirits, which

ought to be continuous and progressive, is the foundation of all strength, blessedness, goodness, in a human character; and if we have it we have the germ of all possible excellence and growth, not because of what it is in itself, for in itself it is nothing more than the opening of the heart to the reception of the celestial influences of grace and righteousness that He pours down. And, therefore, this is the thing that a wise man will most desire for himself, and for those that are dearest to him.

Depend upon it, whether it is what we want most or not, it is what God wants most for us. He does not care nearly so much that our lives should be joyful as that they should be righteous and full of faith; and He subjects us to many a sorrow and loss and disappointment in order that the life of nature may be broken and the life of faith may be strong. If we rightly understand the relative value of outward and of inward things, we shall be thankful for the storms that drive us nearer to Him; for the darkening earth that may make the pillar of cloud glow at the heart into a pillar of fire, and for all the discipline, painful though it may be, with which God answers the prayer, 'Lord, increase our faith.'

II. And now, next, notice how inseparably associated with a true faith is love.

The one is effect that never is found without its cause; the other is cause which never but produces its effect. These two are braided together by the Apostle as inseparable in reality and inseparable in thought. And that it is so is plain enough, and there follow from it some practical lessons that I desire to lay upon your hearts and my own.

There are, then, here two principles, or rather two

sides of one thought; no faith without love, no love without faith.

No faith is genuine and deep which does not at once produce in the heart where it is lodged an answering love to God. That is clear enough. Faith is, as I have said, the recognition and the reception of the divine love into the heart; and we are so constituted as that if a man once knows and believes in any real sense the love that God has to him, he answers it back again with his love as certainly as an echo which gives back the sound that reaches it.

Our faith is, if I may so say, like a burning-glass, which concentrates the rays of the divine love upon our hearts, and focuses them into a point that kindles our hearts into flame. If we have the confidence that God loves us, in any real depth, we shall answer by the gush of our love to Him.

And so here is a test for men's faith. You call yourselves Christians. If I were to come to you and ask you, 'Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?' most of you would say, 'Yes!' Try your faith, my friend, by this test: Does it make you love Him at all? If it does not, it is more words than anything else; and it needs a wonderful deepening before it can have any real power in your hearts. There is no faith worthy the name unless its child, all but as old as itself, be the answer of the heart to Him, pouring itself out in thankful gratitude.

No love without faith; 'we love Him because He first loved us.' God must begin, we can only come second. Man's natural selfishness is only overcome by the clearest demonstration of the love of God to him; and until that love, in its superbest because its lowliest form, the form of the sacrifice on the Cross, has pene-

trated into a man's heart through his faith, there will be no love.

So then, dear friends, there is a test for your love. We hear a great deal said nowadays, as there has always been a great deal said, about the essence of all religion consisting in love to God; and about men 'rejecting the cumbrous dogmas of the New Testament, and falling back upon the great and simple truths, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength; and thy neighbour as thyself,' and saying 'that is their religion.' Well, I venture to say that without the faith of the heart in, not the cumbrous dogmas, but the central fact of the New Testament, that Christ died on the Cross for me, you will never get the old commandment of love to God with heart and soul and strength and mind really kept and carried out; and that if you want men to have their hearts and wills bound into loving fellowship with God, it is only by the path of faith in Him who is the sacrifice for sin that such fellowship is reached. Hence there follows a very plain, practical advice. Do you want your heart's love to be increased? Learn the way to do it. You cannot work yourselves into a fervour of religious emotion of any valuable kind. A man cannot get to love more by saying, 'I am determined I will.' We have no direct control over our affections in that fashion. You cannot make water boil except by one way, and that is by putting plenty of fire under it; and you cannot make your affections melt and flow except by heating them by the contemplation of the truth which is intended to bring them out. That is to say, the more we exercise our minds on the contemplation of Christ's great love to us, and

the more we put forth the energies of our souls in the act of simple self-distrust and reliance upon Him, the more will our love be fervent and strong. You can only increase love by increasing the faith from which it comes. So do you see to it, if you call yourselves Christians, that you try to deepen all your Christian affections by an honest, meditative, prayerful contemplation and grasp of the great love of God in Jesus Christ. And do not wonder if your Christian life be, as it is in so many of us, stunted, not progressive, bringing no blessing to ourselves, and little good to anybody else. The explanation is easy enough. You do not look at the Cross of Christ, nor live in the contemplation and reception of His great grace.

III. And now, lastly, these two inseparably associated graces of faith and love bring with them, and lead to, the third—peace.

It seems to be but a very modest, sober-tinted wish which the Apostle here has for his brethren that the highest and best thing he can ask for them is only quiet. Very modest by the side of joy and excitement, in their coats of many colours, and yet the deepest and truest blessing that any of us can have—peace. It comes to us by one path, and that is by the path of faith and love.

These two bring peace with God, peace in our inmost spirits, the peace of self-annihilation and submission, the peace of obedience, the peace of ceasing from our own works, and entering, therefore, into the rest of God. Trust is peace. There is no tranquillity like that of feeling 'I am not responsible for this: He is; and I rest myself on Him.'

Love is peace. There is no rest for our hearts but on the bosom of some one that is dear to us, and in whom

we can confide. But ah, brother! every tree in which the dove nestles is felled down sooner or later, and the nest torn to pieces, and the bird flies away. But if we turn ourselves to the undying Christ, the perpetual revelation of the eternal God, then, then our love and our faith will bring us rest. There will be peace in trusting Him whom we never can trust and be put to shame. There will be peace in loving Him who is more than worthy of and able to repay the deep and perennial love of all hearts.

Self-surrender is peace. It is our wills that trouble us. Disturbance comes, not from without, but from within. When the will bows, when I say, 'Be it then as Thou wilt,' when in faith and love I cease to strive, to murmur, to rebel, to repine, and enter into His loving purposes, then there is peace.

Obedience is peace. To recognise a great will that is sovereign, and to bow myself to it, not because it is sovereign, but because it is sweet, and sweet because I love it, and love Him whose it is—that is peace. And then, whatever may be outward circumstances, there shall be 'peace subsisting at the heart of endless agitation'; and deep in my soul I may be tranquil, though all about me may be the hurly-burly of the storm.

The Christian peace is an armed peace, paradoxical as it appears; and according to the great word of the Apostle, is a sentry which garrisons the beleaguered heart and mind, surrounded by many foes, and keeps them in Christ Jesus.

'There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked,' he is 'as a troubled sea which cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt'; but over the wildest commotion one Voice, low, gentle, omnipotent, says: 'Peace! be still!' and the heart quiets itself, though

there may be a ground swell, and the weather clears. He is your peace, trust Him, love Him, and you cannot but possess the 'peace of God which passeth understanding.'

THE WIDE RANGE OF GOD'S GRACE

'Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.'

EPHES. VI. 24.

IN turning to the great words which I have read as a text, I ask you to mark their width and their simplicity. They are wide; they follow a very comprehensive benediction, with which, so to speak, they are concentric. But they sweep a wider circle. The former verse says, 'Peace be to the brethren.' But beyond the brethren in these Asiatic churches (as a kind of circular letter to whom this epistle was probably sent) there rises before the mind of the Apostle a great multitude, in every nation, and they share in his love, and in the promise and the prayer of my text. Mark its simplicity everything is brought down to its most general expression. All the qualifications for receiving the divine gift are gathered up in one—love. All the variety of the divine gifts is summed up in that one comprehensive expression—'grace.'

I. So then, note, first, the comprehensive designation of the recipients of grace.

They are 'all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in incorruption.' Little need be said explanatory of the force of this general expression. We usually find that where Scripture reduces the whole qualification for the reception of the divine gift, and the conditions which unite to Jesus Christ, to one, it is faith, not love, that is chosen. But here the Apostle takes the process at the second stage, and instead of emphasising the

faith which is the first step, he dwells upon the love which is its uniform consequence. This love rests upon the faith in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Then note the solemn fulness of the designations of the object of this faith-born love. 'Jesus Christ our Lord'—the name of His humanity; the name of His office; the designation of His dominion. He is Jesus the Man. Jesus is the Christ, the Fulfiller of all prophecy; the flower of all previous revelation; the Anointed of God with the fulness of His Divine Spirit as Prophet, Priest, and King. Jesus Christ is the Lord—which, at the lowest, expresses sovereignty, and if regard be had to the Apostolic usage, expresses something more, even participation in Deity. And it is this whole Christ, the Jesus, the Christ, the Lord; the love to whom, built upon the faith in Him in all these aspects and characteristics, constitutes the true unity of the true Church.

That Church is not built upon a creed, but it is built upon a whole Christ, and not a maimed one. And so we must have a love which answers to all those sides of that great revealed character, and is warm with human love to Jesus; and is trustful with confiding love to the Christ; and is lowly with obedient love to the Lord. And I venture to go a step further, and say, —and is devout with adoring love to the eternal Son of the Father. This is the Apostle's definition of what makes a Christian: Faith that grasps the whole Christ and love that therefore flows to Him. It binds all who possess it into one great unity. As against a spurious liberalism which calls them Christians who lay hold of a fragment of the one entire and perfect chrysolite, we must insist that a Christian is one who knows Jesus, who knows Christ, who knows the Lord, and

who loves Him in all these aspects. Only we must remember, too, that many a time a man's heart outruns his creed, and that many a soul glows with truer, deeper, more saving devotion and trust to a Christ whom the intellect imperfectly apprehends, than are realised by unloving hearts that are associated with clearer heads. Orchids grow in rich men's greenhouses, fastened to a bit of stick, and they spread a fairer blossom that lasts longer than many a plant that is rooted in a more fertile soil. Let us be thankful for the blessed inconsistencies which knit some to the Christ who is more to them than they know.

There is also here laid down for us the great principle, as against all narrowness and all externalism, and all so-called ecclesiasticism, that to be joined to Jesus Christ is the one condition which brings a man into the blessed unity of the Church. Now it seems to me that, however they may be to be lamented on other grounds, and they are to be lamented on many, the existence of diverse Churches does not necessarily interfere with this deep-seated and central unity. There is a great deal said to-day about the reunion of Christendom, by which is meant the destruction of existing communions and the formation of a wider one. I do not believe, and I suppose you do not, that our existing ecclesiastical organisations are the final form of the Church of the living God. But let us remember that the two things are by no means contradictory, the belief in, and the realising of, the essential unity of the Church, and the existence of diverse communions. You will see on the side of many a Cumberland hill a great stretch of limestone with clefts a foot or two deep in it—there are flowers in the clefts, by the bye—but go down a couple of yards and the

divisions have all disappeared, and the base-rock stretches continuously. The separations are superficial; the unity is fundamental. Do not let us play into the hands of people whose only notion of unity is that of a mechanical juxtaposition held together by some formula or orders; but let us recognise that the true unity is in the presence of Jesus Christ in the midst, and in the common grasp of Him by us all.

There is a well-known hymn which was originally intended as a High Church manifesto, which thrusts at us Nonconformists when it sings:

‘We are not divided,
All one body we.’

And oddly enough, but significantly too, it has found its way into all our Nonconformist hymn-books, and we, ‘the sects,’ are singing it, with perhaps a nobler conception of what the oneness of the body, and the unity of the Church is, than the writer of the words had. ‘We are not divided,’ though we be organised apart. ‘All one body we,’ for we all partake of that one bread, and the unifying principle is a common love to the one Jesus Christ our Lord.

II. Mark the impartial sweep of the divine gifts.

My text is a benediction, or a prayer; but it is also a prophecy, or a statement, of the inevitable and uniform results of love to Jesus Christ. The grace will follow that love, necessarily and certainly, and the lovers will get the gift of God because their love has brought them into living contact with Jesus Christ; and His life will flow over into theirs. I need not remind you that the word ‘grace’ in Scripture means, first of all, the condescending love of God to inferiors, to sinners, to those who deserved something else; and, secondly, the wholefulness of blessing and gift that follow upon that love.

And, says Paul, these great gifts from heaven, the one gift in which all are comprised, will surely follow the opening of the heart in love to Jesus Christ.

Ah, brethren! God's grace makes uncommonly short work of ecclesiastical distinctions. The great river flows through territories that upon men's maps are painted in different colours, and of which the inhabitants speak in different tongues. The Rhine laves the pine-trees of Switzerland, and the vines of Germany, and the willows of Holland; and God's grace flows through all places where the men that love Him do dwell. It rises, as it were, right over the barriers that they have built between each other. The little pools on the sea-shore are separate when the tide is out, but when it comes up it fills all the pot-holes that the pebbles have made, and unifies them in one great flashing, dancing mass; and so God's grace comes to all that love Him, and confirms their unity.

Surely that is the true test of a living Church. 'When Barnabas came, and saw the grace of God, he was glad.' It was not what he had expected, but he was open to conviction. The Church where he saw it had been very irregularly constituted; it had no orders and no sacraments, and had been set a-going by the spontaneous efforts of private Christians, and he came to look into the facts. He asked for nothing more when he saw that the converts had the life within them. And so we, with all our faults—and God forbid that I should seem to minimise these—with all our faults, we poor Nonconformists, left to the uncovenanted mercies, have our share of that gift of grace as truly, and, if our love be deeper, more abundantly, than the Churches that are blessed with orders and sacraments, and an 'unbroken historical

continuity.' And when we are unchurched for our lack of these, let us fall back upon St. Augustine's 'Where Christ is, there the Church is'; and believe that to us, even to us also, the promise is fulfilled, 'Lo! I am with you always, even to the end of the world.'

III. Lastly, note the width to which our sympathies should go.

The Apostle sends out his desires and prayers so as to encircle the same area as the grace of God covers and as His love enfolds. And we are bound to do the same.

I am not going to talk about organic unity. The age for making new denominations is, I suppose, about over. I do not think that any sane man would contemplate starting a new Church nowadays. The rebound from the iron rigidity of a mechanical unity that took place at the Reformation naturally led to the multiplication of communities, each of which laid hold of something that to it seemed important. The folly of ecclesiastical rulers who insisted upon non-essentials lays the guilt of the schism at *their* doors, and not at the doors of the minority who could not, in conscience, accept that which never should have been insisted upon as a condition. But whilst we must all feel that power is lost, and much evil ensues from the isolation, such as it is, of the various Churches, yet we must remember that re-union is a slow process; that an atmosphere springs up round each body which is a very subtle, but none the less a very powerful, force, and that it will take a very, very long time to overcome the difficulties and to bring about any reconstruction on a large scale. But why should there be three Presbyterian Churches in Scotland, with the same creed, confessions of faith, and ecclesiastical constitution? Why should there be half a dozen Methodist

bodies in England, of whom substantially the same thing may be said? Will it always pass the wit of man for Congregationalists and Baptists to be one body, without the sacrifice of conviction upon either side? Surely no! You young men may see these fair days; men like me can only hope that they will come and do a little, such as may be possible in a brief space, to help them on.

Putting aside, then, all these larger questions, I want, in a sentence or two, to insist with you upon the duty that lies on us all, and which every one of us may bear a share in discharging. There ought to be a far deeper consciousness of our fundamental unity. They talk a great deal about 'the rivalries of jarring sects.' I believe that is such an enormous exaggeration that it is an untruth. There is rivalry, but you know as well as I do that, shabby and shameful as it is, it is a kind of commercial rivalry between contiguous places of worship, be they chapels or churches, be they buildings belonging to the same or to different denominations. I, for my part, after a pretty long experience now, have seen so little of that said bitter rivalry between the Nonconformist sects, *as sects*, that to me it is all but non-existent. And I believe the most of us ministers, going about amongst the various communities, could say the same thing. But in the face of a cultivated England laughing at your creed of Jesus, the Christ, the Lord; and in the face of a strange and puerile recrudescence of sacerdotalism and sacramentarianism, which shoves a priest and a rite into the place where Christ should stand, it becomes us Nonconformists who believe that we know a more excellent way to stand shoulder to shoulder, and show that the unities that bind us are far more than the diversities that separate.

It becomes us, too, to further conjoint action in social matters. Thank God we are beginning to stir in that direction in Manchester—not before it was time. And I beseech you professing Christians, of all Evangelical communions, to help in bringing Christian motives and principles to bear on the discussion of social and municipal and economical conditions in this great city of ours.

And there surely ought to be more concert than we have had in aggressive work; that we should a little more take account of each other's action in regulating our own; and that we should not have the scandal, which we too often have allowed to exist, of overlapping one another in such a fashion as that rivalry and mere trade competition is almost inevitable.

These are very humble, prosaic suggestions, but they would go a long way, if they were observed, to sweeten our own tempers, and to make visible to the world our true unity. Let us all seek to widen our sympathies as widely as Christ's grace flows; to count none strangers whom He counts friends; to discipline ourselves to feel that we are girded with that electric chain which makes all who grasp it one, and sends the same keen thrill through them all. If a circle were a mile in diameter, and its circumference were dotted with many separate points, how much nearer each of these would be if it were moved inwards, on a straight line, closer to the centre, so as to make a circle a foot across. The nearer we come to the One Lord, in love, communion, and likeness, the nearer shall we be to one another.

EXPOSITIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D., Litt. D.

FIRST AND SECOND PETER
AND FIRST JOHN

CONTENTS

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF PETER

	PAGE
SOJOURNERS OF THE DISPERSION (1 Peter i. 1) . . .	1
BY, THROUGH, UNTO (1 Peter i. 5) . . .	7
SORROWFUL, YET ALWAYS REJOICING (1 Peter i. 6) . .	17
THE TRUE GOLD AND ITS TESTING (1 Peter i. 7) . . .	27
JOY IN BELIEVING (1 Peter i. 8)	34
CHRIST AND HIS CROSS THE CENTRE OF THE UNIVERSE	
(1 Peter i. 10, 11, 12)	41
HOPE PERFECTLY (1 Peter i. 13)	51
THE FAMILY LIKENESS (1 Peter i. 15)	61
FATHER AND JUDGE (1 Peter i. 17)	69
PURIFYING THE SOUL (1 Peter i. 22)	76
LIVING STONES ON THE LIVING FOUNDATION STONE (1	
Peter ii. 4, 5)	86
SPIRITUAL SACRIFICES (1 Peter ii. 5)	92

	PAGE
MIRRORS OF GOD (1 Peter ii. 9)	101
CHRIST THE EXEMPLAR (1 Peter ii. 21)	107
HALLOWING CHRIST (1 Peter iii. 14, 15)	116
CHRISTIAN ASCETICISM (1 Peter iv. 1-8)	123
THE SLAVE'S GIRDLE (1 Peter v. 5)	130
SYLVANUS (1 Peter v. 12, R. V.)	138
AN APOSTOLIC TESTIMONY AND EXHORTATION (1 Peter v. 12)	146
THE CHURCH IN BABYLON (1 Peter v. 13)	154
MARCUS, MY SON (1 Peter v. 13)	161

THE SECOND EPISTLE OF PETER

LIKE PRECIOUS FAITH (2 Peter i. 1)	170
MAN SUMMONED BY GOD'S GLORY AND ENERGY (2 Peter i. 3)	178
PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE (2 Peter i. 4)	189
THE POWER OF DILIGENCE (2 Peter i. 5)	198
GOING OUT AND GOING IN (2 Peter i. 11, 15)	206
THE OWNER AND HIS SLAVES (2 Peter ii. 1)	215
BE DILIGENT (2 Peter iii. 14)	224
GROWTH (2 Peter iii. 18)	234

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

	PAGE
THE MESSAGE AND ITS PRACTICAL RESULTS (1 John i. 5-ii. 6)	247
WALKING IN THE LIGHT (1 John i. 7)	253
THE COMMANDMENT, OLD YET NEW (1 John ii. 7, 8)	261
YOUTHFUL STRENGTH (1 John ii. 14)	269
RIVER AND ROCK (1 John ii. 17)	279
THE LOVE THAT CALLS US SONS (1 John iii. 1)	289
THE UNREVEALED FUTURE OF THE SONS OF GOD (1 John iii. 2)	301
THE PURIFYING INFLUENCE OF HOPE (1 John iii. 3)	310
PRACTICAL RIGHTEOUSNESS (1 John iii. 7)	320
CHRIST'S MISSION THE REVELATION OF GOD'S LOVE (1 John iv. 10)	329
THE SERVANT AS HIS LORD (1 John iv. 17)	338
LOVE AND FEAR (1 John iv. 18)	347
THE RAY AND THE REFLECTION (1 John iv. 19)	355

I. PETER

SOJOURNERS OF THE DISPERSION

'Peter, an Apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered . . .'-1 PETER i. 1.

THE words rendered 'strangers scattered' are literally 'sojourners of the Dispersion,' and are so rendered in the Revised Version. The Dispersion was the recognised name for the Jews dwelling in Gentile countries; as, for instance, it is employed in John's Gospel, when the people in Jerusalem say, 'Whither will this man go that we shall not find Him? Will he go to the Dispersion amongst the Greeks?' Obviously, therefore the word here may refer to the scattered Jewish people, but the question arises whether the letter corresponds to its apparent address, or whether the language which is employed in it does not almost oblige us to see here a reference, not to the Jew, but to the whole body of Christian people, who, whatever may be their outward circumstances, are, in the deepest sense, in the foundations of their life, if they be Christ's, 'strangers of the Dispersion.'

Now if we look at the letter we find such words as these—'The times of your ignorance'—'your vain manner of life handed down from your fathers'—'in time past were not a people'—'the time past may suffice to have wrought the will of the Gentiles'—all of which, as you see, can only be accommodated to Jewish believers by a little gentle violence, but all of which

find a proper significance if we suppose them addressed to Gentiles, to whom they are only applicable in the higher sense of the words to which I have referred. If we understand them so, we have here an instance of what runs all through the letter; the taking hold of Jewish ideas for the purpose of lifting them into a loftier region, and transfiguring them into the expression of Christian truth. For example, we read in it: 'Ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation'; and again: 'Ye are built up a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices.' These and other similar passages are instances of precisely the same transference of Jewish ideas as I find, in accordance with many good commentators, in the words of my text.

So, then, here is Peter's notion of—

I. What the Christian Life is.

All those who really have faith in Jesus Christ are 'strangers of the Dispersion'; scattered throughout the world, and dwelling dispersedly in an order of things to which they do not belong, 'seeking a city which hath foundations.' The word 'strangers' means, originally, persons for a time living in an alien city. And that is the idea that the Apostle would impress upon us as true for each of us, in the measure in which our Christianity is real. For, remember, although all men may be truly spoken of as being 'pilgrims and sojourners upon the earth' by reason of both the shortness of the duration of their earthly course and the disproportion between their immortal part and the material things amongst which they dwell, Peter is thinking of something very different from either the brevity of earthly life or the infinite necessities of an

immortal spirit when he calls his Christian brethren strangers. Not because we are men, not because we are to die soon, and the world is to outlast us; not because other people will one day live in our houses and read our books and sit upon our chairs, and we shall be forgotten, but because we are Christ's people are we here sojourners, and must regard this as not our rest. Not because our immortal soul cannot satisfy itself, however it tries, upon the trivialities of earth any more than a human appetite can on the husks that the swine do eat, but because new desires, tastes, aspirations, affinities, have been kindled in us by the new life that has flowed into us; therefore the connection that other men have with the world, which makes some of them altogether 'men of the world, whose portion is in this life,' is for us broken, and we are strangers, scattered abroad, solitary, not by reason of the inevitable loneliness in which, after all love and companionship, every soul lives; not by reason of losses or deaths, but by reason of the contrariety between the foundation of our lives, and the foundation of the lives of the men round us; therefore we stand lonely in the midst of crowds; strangers in the ordered communities of the world.

Ah, there is no solitude so utter as the solitude of being the only man in a crowd that has a faith in his heart, and there is no isolating power like the power of rending all ties that true attachment with Jesus Christ has. 'Think not that I am come to bring peace on earth, but a sword'—to set a man against his own household, if they be not of the household of faith. These things are the inevitable issues of religion—to make us strangers, isolated in the midst of this world.

And now let us think of—

II. Some of the plain consequent duties that arise from this characteristic of the Christian Life.

Let me put them in the shape of one or two practical counsels. First let us try to keep up, vivid and sharp, a sense of separation. I do not mean that we should withdraw ourselves from sympathies, nor from services, nor from the large area of common ground which we have with our fellows, whether they be Christians or no—with our fellow-citizens; with those who are related to us by various bonds, by community of purpose, of aim, of opinion, or of affection. But just as Abraham was willing to go down into the plain and fight for Lot, though he would not go down and live in Sodom, and just as he would enter into relations of amity with the men of the land, and yet would not abandon his black camels'-hair tent, pitched beneath the terebinth tree, in order to go into their city and abide with them, so one great part of the wisdom of a Christian man is to draw the line of separation decisively, and yet to keep true to the bond of union. Unless Christian people do make a distinct effort to keep themselves apart from the world and its ways, they will get confounded with these, and when the end comes they will be destroyed with them.

Sometimes voyagers find upon some lonely island an English castaway, who has forgotten home, and duty, and everything else, to luxuriate in an easy life beneath tropical skies, and has degraded himself to the level of the savage islanders round him. There are professing Christians—perhaps in my audience—who, like that poor castaway, have 'forgotten the imperial palace whence they came,' and have gone down and down

and down, to live the fat, contented, low lives of the men who find their good upon earth and not in heaven. Do you, dear brethren, try to keep vivid the sense that you belong to another community. As Paul puts it, with a metaphor drawn from Gentile instead of from Jewish life, as in our text, 'Our citizenship is in heaven.' Philippi, to the Christian Church of which that was said, was a Roman colony; and the characteristics of a Roman colony were that the inhabitants were enrolled as members of the Roman tribes, and had their names on the register of Rome, and were governed by its laws. So we, living here in an outlying province, have our names written in the 'Golden Book' of the citizens of the new Jerusalem. Do not forget, if I might use a very homely illustration, what parish your settlement is in; remember what kingdom you belong to.

Again, if we are strangers of the Dispersion, let us live by our own country's laws, and not by the codes that are current in this foreign land where we are settled for a time. You remember what was the complaint of the people in Persia to Esther's king? 'There is a people whose laws are different from all the peoples that be upon the earth.' That was an offence that could not be tolerated in a despotism that ground everything down to the one level of a slavish uniformity. It will be well for us Christian people if men look at us, and say, 'Ah, that man has another rule of conduct from the one that prevails generally. I wonder what is the underlying principle of his life; it evidently is not the same as mine.'

Live by our King's law. People in our colonies, at least the officials, set wonderful store by the approbation of the Colonial Office at home. It does not matter

what the colonial newspapers say, it is 'what will they say in Downing Street?' And if a despatch goes out approving of their conduct, neighbours may censure and sneer as they list. So we Christians have to report to Home, and have so to live 'that whether present or absent'—in a colony or in the mother country—'we may be well pleasing unto Him.'

Keep up the honour and advance the interests of your own country. You are here, among other reasons, to represent your King, and people take their notions of Him very considerably from their experience of you. So see to it that you live like the Master whom you say you serve.

The Russian Government sends out what are called military colonies, studded along the frontier, with the one mission of extending the empire. We are set along the frontier with the same mission. The strangers are scattered. Congested, they would be less useful; dispersed, they may push forward the frontiers. Seed in a seed-basket is not in its right place; but sown broadcast over the field, it will be waving wheat in a month or two. 'Ye are the salt of the earth'—salt is *sprinkled* over what it is intended to preserve. You are the strangers of the Dispersion, that you may be the messengers of the Evangelisation.

Lastly, let us be glad when we think, and let us often think, of—

III. The Home in Glory.

That is a beautiful phrase which pairs off with the one in my text, in which another Apostle speaks of the ultimate end as 'our gathering together in Christ.' All the scattered ones, like chips of wood in a whirlpool, drift gradually closer and closer, until they unite in a

solid mass in the centre. So at the last the 'strangers' are to be brought and settled in their own land, and their lonely lives are to be filled with happy companionship, and they to be in a more blessed unity than now. 'Fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God.' If we, dwelling in this far-off land, were habitually to talk, as Australians do of coming to England of 'going home,' though born in the colony, it would be a glad day for us when we set out on the journey. If Christian people lived more by faith, as they profess to do, and less by sight, they would oftener think of the home-coming and the union; and would be happy when they thought that they were here but for awhile, and when they realised these two blessed elements of permanence and of companionship, which another Apostle packs into one sentence, along with that which is greater than them both, 'so shall we ever be with the Lord.'

BY, THROUGH, UNTO

' . . . Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.'—1 PETER i. 5.

THE Revised Version substitutes 'guarded' for 'kept,' and the alteration, though slight, is important, for it not only more accurately preserves the meaning of the word employed, but it retains the military metaphor which is in it. The force of the expression will appear if I refer, in a sentence, to other cases in which it is employed in the New Testament. For instance, we read that the governor of Damascus '*kept* the city with a garrison,' which is the same word, and in its purely metaphorical usage Paul employs it when he

says that 'the peace of God shall keep'—guard, garrison—'your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.' We have to think of some defenceless position, some unwall'd village out in the open, with a strong force round it, through which no assailant can break, and in the midst of which the weakest can sit secure. Peter thinks that every Christian has assailants whom no Christian by himself can repel, but that he may, if he likes, have an impregnable ring of defence drawn round him, which shall fling back in idle spray the wildest onset of the waves, as a breakwater or a cliff might do.

Then there is another very beautiful and striking point to be made, and that is the connection between the words of my text and those immediately preceding. The Apostle has been speaking about 'the inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away,' and he says 'it is reserved in Heaven for you who are kept.' So, then, the same power is working on both sides of the veil, preserving the inheritance for the heirs, and preserving the heirs for the inheritance. It will not fail them, and they will not miss it. It were of little avail to care for either of the two members separately, but the same hand that is preparing the inheritance and making it ready for the owners is round about the pilgrims, and taking care of them till they get home.

So, then, our Apostle is looking at this keeping in three aspects, suggested by his three words 'by,' 'through,' 'unto,' which respectively express the real cause or power, the condition or occasion on which that power works, and the end or purpose to which it works. So these three little words will do for lines on which to run our thoughts now—'by,' 'through,' 'for.'

I. In the first place, what are we guarded for?

‘Guarded . . . unto salvation.’ Now that great word ‘salvation’ was a new and strange one to Peter’s readers—so new and strange that probably they did not understand it in its full nobleness and sweep. Our understanding of it, or, at least, our impression of it, is weakened by precisely the opposite cause. It has become so tarnished and smooth-rubbed that it creates very little definite impression. Like a bit of seaweed lifted out of the sunny waves which opened its fronds and brightened its delicate colours, it has become dry and hard and sapless and dim. But let me try for one moment to freshen it for our conceptions and our hearts. Salvation has in it the double idea of being made safe, and being made sound. Peril threatening to slay, and sickness unto death, are the implications of the conditions which this great word presupposes. The man that needs to be saved needs to be rescued from peril and needs to be healed of a disease. And if you do not know and feel that that is *you*, then you have not learned the first letters of the alphabet which are necessary to spell ‘salvation.’ You, I, every man, we are all sick unto death, because the poison of self-will and sin is running hot through all our veins, and we are all in deadly peril because of that poison—peril of death, peril arising from the weight of guilt that presses upon us, peril from our inevitable collision with the Divine law and government which make for righteousness.

And so salvation means, negatively, the deliverance from all the evils, whether they be evils of sorrow or evils of sin, which can affect a man, and which do affect us all in some measure. But it means far more than that, for God’s salvation is no half-and-half thing, contented, as

some benevolent man might be, in a widespread flood ordiaster, with rescuing the victims and putting them high up enough for the water not to reach them, and leaving them there shivering cold and starving. But when God begins by taking away evils, it is in order that He may clear a path for flooding us with good. And so salvation is not merely what some of you think it is, the escape from a hell, nor only what some of you more nobly take it to be, a deliverance from the power of sin in your hearts; but it is the investiture of each of us with every good and glory, whether of happiness or of purity, which it is possible for a man to receive and for God to give. It is the great word of the New Testament, and they do a very questionable service to humanity who weaken the grandeur and the greatness of the Scriptural conception of salvation, by weakening the darkness and the terrible-ness of the Scriptural conception of the dangers and the sicknesses from which it delivers.

But, then, there is another point that I would suggest raised by the words of my text in their connection. Peter is here evidently speaking about a future manifestation of absolute exemption from all the ills that flesh and spirit are heir to, and radiant investure with all the good that humanity can put on, which lies beyond the great barrier of this mortal life. And that complete salvation, in its double aspect, is obviously the end for which all that guarding of life is lavished upon us, as it is the end for which all the discipline of life is given to us, and as it is the end for which the bitter agony and pain of the Christ on the Cross were freely rendered. But that ultimate and superlative perfection has its roots and its beginning here. And so in Scripture you find salvation sometimes regarded as a thing in the past

experience of every Christian man which he received at the very beginning of his course, and sometimes you have it treated as being progressive, running on continually through all his days; and sometimes you have it treated, as in my text, as laid up yonder, and only to be reached when life is done with. But just a verse or two after my text we read that the Christian man here, on condition of his loving Jesus Christ and believing in Him, rejoices because he here and now 'receives the end of his faith, even the salvation of his soul.' And so there are the two things—the incipient germ to-day, the full-foliaged fruit-bearing tree planted in the higher house of the Lord.

These two things are inseparably intertwined. The Christian life in its imperfection here, the partial salvation of to-day demands, unless the universe is a chaos and there is no personal God the centre of it, a future life, in which all that is here tendency shall be realised possession, and in which all that here but puts up a pale and feeble shoot above the ground, shall grow and blossom and bear fruit unto life eternal. 'Like the new moon with a ragged edge, e'en in its imperfections beautiful,' all the characteristics of Christian life on earth prophesy that the orb is crescent, and will one day round itself into its pure silvery completeness. If you see a great wall in some palace, with slabs of polished marble for most of its length, and here and there stretches of course rubble shoved in, you would know that that was not the final condition, that the rubble had to be cased over, or taken out and replaced by the lucent slab that reflected the light, and showed, by its reflecting, its own mottled beauty. Thus the very inconsistencies, the thwarted desires, the broken resolutions, the aspira-

tion that never can clothe themselves in the flesh of reality, which belong to the Christian life, declare that this is but the first stage of the structure, and point onwards to the time when the imperfections shall be swept away, 'and for brass He will bring gold, for iron He will bring silver,' and then the windows shall be set 'in agates, and the gates in carbuncles, and all the borders in pleasant stones.' Perfect salvation is obviously the only issue of the present imperfect salvation.

That is what you are 'kept' for. That is what Christ died to bring you. That is what God, like a patient workman bringing out the pattern in his loom by many a throw of a sharp-pointed shuttle, and much twisting of the threads into patterns, is trying to make of you, and that is what Christ on the Cross has died to effect. Brethren, let us think more than we do, not only of the partial beginnings here, but of that perfect salvation for which Christian men are being 'kept' and guarded, and which, if you and I will observe the conditions, is as sure to come as that X, Y, Z follow A, B, C. That is what we are kept for.

II. Notice what we are guarded by.

'The *power* of God,' says Peter, laying hold of the most general expression that he can find, not caring to define ways and means, but pointing to the one great force that is sure to do it.

Now if we were to translate with perfect literality, we should read, not *by* the power of God, but *in* the power of God. And whilst it is quite probable that what Peter meant was 'by,' I think it adds great force and beauty to the passage, and is entirely accordant with the military metaphor, which I have already pointed out, if we keep the simple local sense of the word, and read,

'guarded *in* the power of God.' And that suggests a whole stream of Scriptural representations, both in the Old and in the New Testament. Let me recall one or two. 'The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it and is safe.' 'He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.' 'Israel shall dwell safely,' says one of the old prophets, 'in unwall'd villages, for I will be a wall of fire round about her.' The psalmist said, 'The Angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him.' And all these representations concur in this one thought, that we are safe, enclosed in God, and that He, by His power, compasses us about. And so no foe can get at us who cannot break down or climb over the encircling wall of defence. An army in an enemy's country will march in hollow square, and put its most precious treasures, or its weaker members, its sick, its women, its children, its footsore, into the middle there, and with a line of lances on either side, and stalwart arms to wield them, the feeblest need fear no foe. We 'are kept in the power of God unto salvation.'

But do not forget how, far beyond the psalmist and prophet, and in something far more sublime and wonderful than a poetic figure, the New Testament catches up the same phrase, and gives us, as the condition of vitality, as the condition of fertility, as the condition of tranquillity, as the condition of security, the same thing — 'in Christ.' Remember His very last words prior to His great intercessory prayer, in which He spoke about keeping those that were given Him in His name. And just before that He said to them, 'In the world ye shall have tribulation, but in Me ye shall have peace.' Kept, guarded as behind the battlements of some great fort,

which has in its centre a quiet, armoured chamber into which no noise of battle, nor shout of foeman, can ever come. 'In Christ,' though the world is all in arms without, 'ye shall have peace.' 'Guarded in the power of God unto salvation.'

III. Lastly, what we are kept through.

'Through faith.' Now there we come across another of the words which we know so well that we do not understand them. You all think that it is the right thing for me to preach about 'faith.' I daresay some of you have never tried to apprehend what it means. And I daresay there are a great many of you to whom the utterance of the word suggests that I am plunging into the bathos and commonplaces of the pulpit. Perhaps, if you would try to understand it, you would find it was a bigger thing than you fancied. What is faith? I will give you another expression that has not so many theological accretions sticking to it, and which means precisely the same thing—trust. And we all know that we do not trust with our heads, but with our hearts and wills. You may believe undoubtedly, and have no faith at all, for it is the heart and the will that go forth, and clutch at the thing trusted; or, as I should rather say, at the person trusted; for, at bottom, what we trust is always a person, and even when we 'trust to nature,' it is because, more or less clearly, we feel that somehow or other at the back of nature there is a Will and an Intelligence that are working and trustworthy. However, that is a subject that I do not need to touch upon here. Faith is trust, trust in a Person, trust that, like the fabled goddess rising, radiant and aspiring to the heavens, out of the roll of the tempestuous ocean, springs from the depths of absolute self-distrust and diffidence. There is

a spurious kind of faith which has no good in it, just because it did not begin with going down into the depths of one's own heart, and finding out how rotten and hopeless everything was there. My friend, no man has a vigorous Christian faith who has not been very near utter despair. 'Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee.' The zenith, which is the highest point in the sky above us, is always just as far aloft as the nadir, which is the lowest point in the sky at the Antipodes, is beneath us. Your faith is measured by your self-despair.

Further, why is it that I must have faith in order to get God's power at work in me? Many people seem to think that faith is appointed by God as the condition of salvation out of mere arbitrary selection and caprice. Not at all. If God could save you without your faith, He would do it. He does not, because He cannot. Why must I have faith in order that God's power may keep me? Why must you open your window in order to let the fresh air in? Why must you pull up the blind in order to let the light in? Why must you take your medicine or your food if you want to be cured or nourished? Why must you pull the trigger if your revolver is to go off? Unless I trust God, distrusting myself, and the spark of faith is struck out of the rock of my heart by the sharp steel in the midst of the darkness of despair, God cannot pour out upon me His power. There is nothing arbitrary about it. It is inseparable from the very nature of the case. If you do not want Him, you cannot have Him. If you do not know that you need Him, you cannot have Him. If you do not trust that He will come to you and help you, you will not have Him.

So then, brother, your faith, my faith, anybody's faith is nothing of itself. It is only the valve that opens and

lets the steam rush in. It is only the tap you turn to let Thirlmere come into your basins. It is not you that saves yourself. It is not your faith that keeps you, any more than it is the outstretched hand with which a man, ready to stumble, grasps the hand of a stalwart, steadfast man on the pavement by his side that keeps him up. It is the other man's hand that holds you up, but it is your hand that lays hold of him. It is God that saves, it is God that guards, it is God that is able to keep us from falling, and to give us an inheritance among all them that are sanctified. He will do it if we turn to Him, and ask and expect Him to do it. If you will comply with the conditions and not else, He will fulfil His promise and accomplish His purpose. But my unbelief can thwart Omnipotence, and hinder Christ's all-loving purpose, just as on earth we read that 'He could there do no mighty works because of their unbelief.' I am sure that there are people here who all their lives long have been thus hampering Omnipotence and neutralising the love of Christ, and making His sacrifice impotent and His wish to save them vain. Stretch out your hands as this very Peter once did, crying, 'Lord, save, or I perish'; and He will answer, not by word only, but by act: 'According to thy faith be it unto thee.' Salvation, here and hereafter, is God's work alone. It cannot be exercised towards a man who has not faith. It will certainly be exercised towards any man who has.

Help us, O Lord, we beseech Thee, to live the lives which we live in the flesh by the faith of the Son of God. And may we know what it is to be in Him, strengthened within with might by His spirit.

SORROWFUL, YET ALWAYS REJOICING

‘Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations.’—1 PETER i. 6.

You will remember the great saying of our Lord’s in the Sermon on the Mount, in which He makes the last of the beatitudes, that which He pronounces upon His disciples, when men shall revile them and persecute them, and speak all manner of evil falsely against them for His sake, and bids them rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is their reward in Heaven.

Now it seems to me that in the words of my text there is a distinct echo of that saying of Christ’s. For not only is the whole context the same, but a somewhat unusual and very strong word which our Lord employs is also employed here by Peter. ‘Rejoice and be *exceeding glad*,’ said Christ. ‘Ye *rejoice greatly*,’ said the Apostle, and he is echoing his Master’s word. Then with regard to the context; Christ proposes to His followers this exceeding gladness as evoked in their hearts by the very thing that might seem to militate against it—viz., men’s antagonism. Similarly, Peter, throughout this whole letter, and in my text, is heartening the disciples against impending persecution, and, like his Lord, he bids them face it, if not ‘with frolic welcome,’ at all events with undiminished and undimmed serenity and cheerfulness. Christ based the exhortation on the thought that great would be their reward in Heaven. Peter points to the salvation ready to be revealed as being the ground of the joy that he enjoined. So in the words and in the whole strain and structure of the exhortation the servant is copying his Master.

But, of course, although the immediate application of these words is to Churches fronting the possibility and probability of actual persecution and affliction for the sake of Jesus Christ, the principle involved applies to us all. And the worries and the sorrows of our daily life need the exhortation here, quite as much as did the martyr's pains. White ants will pick a carcass clean as soon as a lion will, and there is quite as much wear and tear of Christian gladness arising from the small frictions of our daily life as from the great strain and stress of persecution.

So our Apostle has a word for us all. Now it seems to me that in this text there are three things to be noticed: a paradox, a possibility, a duty. 'In which ye rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations.' Look at these three points.

I. This paradox.

Two emotions diametrically opposed are to be contained within the narrow room of one disposition and temper. 'Ye greatly rejoice. . . . Ye are in heaviness.' Can such a thing be? Well! let us think for a moment. The sources of the two conflicting emotions are laid out before us; they may be constantly operative in every life. On the one hand, 'in which ye greatly rejoice.' Now that 'in which' does not point back only to the words that immediately precede, but to the whole complex clause that goes before. And what is the 'which' that is there? These things; the possession of a new life—'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who hath begotten us again!'—the springing up in a man's heart of a strange new hope, like a new star that swims into the sky, and sheds a radiance all about it—'Begotten unto

a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead'; a new wealth—an 'inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away; a new security—guarded by the power of God through faith unto salvation.' These things belong, *ipso facto*, and in the measure of his faith, to every Christian man, a new life, a new hope, a new wealth, and a new security; and in their conjoint action, all four of them brought to bear upon a man's temper and spirit, will, if he is realising them, make him glad.

Then, on the other hand, we have other fountains pouring their streams into the same reservoir. And just as the deep fountains which are open to us by faith will, if we continue to exercise that faith, flood our spirits with sweet waters, so these other fountains will pour their bitter floods over every heart more or less abundantly and continually. 'Now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations.' There are confluent streams that one has sometimes seen, where a clear river joins, and flows in the same bed with, one all foul with half-melted ice, and the two run side by side for a space, scarcely mingling their waters. Thus the paradox of the Christian life is that within the same narrow banks may flow the sunny and the turbid, the clear and the dark, the sorrow that springs from earthly fountains, the joy that pours from the heavenly heights.

Now notice that this is only one case of the paradox of the whole Christian life. For the peculiarity of it is that it owns two;—it belongs to, and is exposed to, all the influences of the forces and things of time, whilst in regard to its depths, it belongs to, and is under the influence of, 'the things that are unseen and eternal'; so that you have the external life common to the Christian and

to all other people, and then you have the life 'hid with Christ in God,' the roots of it going down through all the superficial soil, and grappling the central rock of all things. Thus a series of paradoxes and perennial contradictions describes the twofold life that every believing spirit lives, 'as unknown and yet well known, as dying and, behold we live, as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making rich, as having nothing and yet possessing all things.'

Remember, too, that according to Peter's conception neither of these two sources pours out a flood which obliterates or dams back the other. They are to co-exist. The joy is not to deprive the heaviness of its weight, nor the sorrow of its sting. There is no artificial stoicism about Christianity, no attempt to sophisticate one's self out of believing in the reality of the evils that assail us, or to forbid that we shall feel their pain and their burden. Many good people fail to get the good of life's discipline, because they have somehow come to think that it is wrong to weep when Christ sends sorrows, and wrong to feel, as other men feel, the grip and bite of the manifold trials of our earthly lives. 'Weep for yourselves,' for the feeling of the sorrow is the precedent condition to the benefit from the sorrow, and it yields 'the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby.'

But, on the other hand, the black stream is not to bank up the sunny one, or prevent it from flowing into the heart, ay! and flowing over, the other. And so the co-existence of the joys that come from above, and the sorrows that spring from around, and some of them from beneath, is the very secret of the Christian life.

II. Further, consider the blessed possibility of this paradox.

Can two conflicting emotions live in a man's heart at once? Rather, we might ask, are there ever emotions in a man's heart that are not hemmed in by conflicting ones? Is there ever such a thing in the world's experience as a pure joy, or as a confidence which has no trace of fear in it? Are there any pictures without shadows? They are only daubs if they are. Instead of wondering at this co-existence of joy and sorrow, we must recognise that it is in full accord with all our experience, which never brings a joy, but, like the old story of the magic palace, there is one window unlighted, and which never brings a sorrow so black and over-arching so completely the whole sky, but that somewhere, if the eye would look for it, there is a bit of blue. The possibility of the paradox is in accordance with all human experience.

But then, you say, 'my feelings of joy or sorrow are very largely a matter of temperament, and still more largely a matter of responding to the facts round about me. And I cannot pump up emotions to order; and if I could they would be factitious, artificial, insincere, and do me more harm than good.' Perfectly true. There are a great many ugly names for manufactured emotions, and none of them a bit too ugly. Peter does not wish you to try to get up feeling to order. It is the bane of some type of Christianity that that is done. You cannot thus manufacture emotion. No; but I will tell you what you can do. You can determine what you will think about most, and what you will look at most, and if you settle that, that will settle what you feel. And so, though it is by a roundabout way, we can regulate our emotions. A man travelling in a railway train can choose which side of the

carriage he will look out at, either the one where the sunshine is falling full on the front of each grass-blade and tree, or the side where it is the shadowed side of each that is turned to him. If he will look out of the one window, he will see everything verdant and bright, and if he will look out at the other, there will be a certain sobriety and dulness over the landscape. You can settle which window you are going to look out at. If the one—‘in which ye greatly rejoice.’ If the other—‘ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations.’ You have seen patterns wrought in black and white, you may focus your eye so as to get white on a black ground, or black on a white ground, just as you like. You can do that with your life, and either fix upon the temptations and the heaviness as the main thing, or you can fix upon the new life, and the new wealth, and the new hope, and the new security as the main things. If you do the one, down you will go into the depths of gloom, and if you do the other, up you will spring into the ethereal heights of sober and Christian gladness.

So then, brethren, this possibility depends on these things, the choice of our main object of contemplation, and that breaks up into two thoughts about which I wish to say a word. The reason why so many Christian people have only religion enough to make them gloomy, or to weight them with a sense of burdens and unfulfilled aspirations and broken resolutions, and have not enough to make them glad, is mainly because they do not think enough about the four things in which they might ‘greatly rejoice.’ I believe that most of us would be altogether different people, as professing Christians, if we honestly tried to keep the mightiest things uppermost, and to fill heart and mind far more than we do

with the contemplation of these great facts and truths which, when once they are beheld and cleaved to, are certain to minister gladness to men's souls. These great truths which you and I say we believe, and which we profess to live by, will only work their effect upon us, so long as they are present to our minds and hearts. You can no more expect Christian verities to keep you from falling, or to strengthen you in weakness, or to gladden you in sorrow, if you are not thinking about them, than you can expect the most succulent or most nutritive food to nourish you if you do not eat it. As long as Christ and His grace are present in our hearts and minds by thought, so long, and not one moment longer, do they minister to us the joy of the Lord. You switch off from the main current, and out go all the lights, and when you switch off from Christ out goes the gladness.

Then another thing I would point out is that the possibility of this co-existence of joy and of heaviness depends further on our taking the right point of view from which to look at the sources of the heaviness. Notice how beautifully, although entirely incidentally, and without calling attention to it, Peter here minimises the 'manifold temptations' which he does expect, however minimised, will make men heavy. He calls them 'temptations.' Now that is rather an unfortunate word, because it suggests the idea of something that desires to drag a man into sin. But suppose, instead of 'temptations,' with its unfortunate associations, you were to substitute a word that means the same thing, and is free from that association—viz., 'trial,'—you would get the right point of view. As long as I look at my sorrows mainly in regard to their power to sadden me, I

have not got to the right point of view for them. They *are* meant to sadden me, they are meant to pain, they are meant to bring the tears, they are meant to weight the heart and press down the spirits, but what for? To test what I am made of, and by testing to bring out and strengthen what is good, and to cast out and destroy what is evil. We shall never understand, even so much as it is possible for us to understand, and that is not very much, of the mystery of pain until we come to recognise that its main purpose is to help in making character. And when you think of your sorrows, disappointments, losses, when you think of your pains and sickness, and all the ills that flesh is heir to, principally as being 'trials,' in the deep sense of that word—viz., a means of testing you, and thereby helping you, bettering you, and building up character—then it is more possible to blend the sorrow that they produce with the joy to which they may lead. The Apostle adds the other thought of the transitoriness of sorrow, and yet further, the other of its necessity for the growth of humanity. So they are not only to be felt, not only to be wept over, not only to make us sad, but they are to be accepted, and used as means by which we may be perfected. And when once you get occupied in trying to get all the good that is in it out of a grief, you will be astonished to find how the bitterness that was in it was diminished.

We may have the oil on the water, calming, though not ending, its agitation. We may carry our own atmosphere with us, and like the diver that goes down into depths of the sea, and cannot be reached by the hungry water around his crystal bell, and has communication with the upper air, where the light of the sun is, so

you and I, down at the slimy bottom, and with the waste of water all around us, which if it could get at us would choke us, may walk at liberty, in peace and gladness. And so, 'though the labour of the olive shall fail and the fig tree not blossom, though the flocks be cut off from the folds and the herd from the stalls,' we may joy in the Lord, and 'rejoice in the God of our salvation.'

III. Now lastly, we have here a duty.

Peter takes it for granted that these good people, who had persecution hanging over them, were still rejoicing greatly in the Lord. He does not feel it necessary to enjoin it upon them. It is a matter of course in their Christian life. And you will find that all through the New Testament this same tone is adopted which recognises gladness as being, on the one hand, an inseparable characteristic of the Christian experience, and on the other hand as being a thing that is a Christian man's duty to cultivate. Now I do not believe that the most of Christian people have ever looked at the thing in that light at all. If joy has come to them, they have been thankful for it, but they have very, very seldom felt that, if they are not glad, there is something wrong. And a great many of us, I am sure, have never recognised the fact that it is our duty to 'rejoice in the Lord always.' Have you realised it? I do not mean have you tried to get up, as I have been saying, factitious emotions, but have you felt that if you are doing what, as Christian men or women, it is your plain duty to do, there will come into your hearts this joy of the Lord. I have told you why you are not happier Christians, why so many of us have, as I said, only got religion enough to make you gloomy and burdened. It

is because you do not think enough about Jesus Christ, and what He has given you, and what He is doing for you and in you. It is because you have not the new life in strong experience and possession, and because you have not the new hope springing in your hearts, and because you have not the new wealth realised often in present possession, and because you have not the new security which He is ready to give you. It is your duty, Christian man and woman, to be a joyful Christian, and if you are not, then the negligence is sin.

It is a hard duty. It is not easy to turn away from that which is torturing flesh or sense or natural desires or human affections, and to realise the unseen. It is not easy, but it is possible. And, like all other difficult things, it is worth doing. For there is nothing more helpful, more commendatory, of our Christianity to other people, and more certain to tell on the vigour and efficiency of our Christian service, than that we should be rejoicing in the Lord, and living in the possession of the experience of Christ's joy which He has left for us.

There is one other thing I must say. I have been talking about the co-existence of joy and sorrows. In one form or another that co-existence is universal. The difference is this. A Christian man has superficial sorrows and central gladness, and other men have superficial gladness and central sorrow. 'Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful.' Many of you know what that means—the black aching centre, full of unrest, grimly unparticipant of the dancing delights going on about it, like some black rock that stands up in the midst of a field flooded with sunshine, and gay with flowers. 'The end of that mirth is heaviness.' Better a surface

sadness and a core of joy than the opposite, a skin of verdure over the scarcely cold lava. Better a transient sorrow with an eternal joy than the opposite, mirth, 'like the crackling of thorns under a pot,' which dies down into a doleful ring of black ashes in the pathless desert. Choose whether you will have joy dwelling with and conquering sorrow, or unrest and sorrow, darkening and finally shattering your partial and fleeting joys.

THE TRUE GOLD AND ITS TESTING

'That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory . . .'
1 PETER i. 7.

THE Apostle is fond of that word 'precious.' In both his letters he uses it as an epithet for diverse things. According to one translation, he speaks of Christ as 'precious to you which believe.' He certainly speaks of 'the precious blood of Christ,' and of 'exceeding great and precious promises,' and here in my text, as well as in the Second Epistle, he speaks about 'precious faith.' It is a very wide general term, not expressing anything very characteristic beyond the one notion of value. But in the text, according to our Authorised Version, it looks at first sight as if it were not the faith, but the *trial* of the faith that the Apostle regards as thus valuable. There are difficulties of rendering which I need not trouble you with. Suffice it to say that, speaking roughly and popularly, the 'trial of your faith' here seems to mean rather the *result of* that trial, and might be fairly represented by the slightly varied expression, 'your faith having been tried, might be found,' etc.

I must not be tempted to discourse about the reasons

why such a rendering seems to express the Apostle's meaning more fully, but, taking it for granted, there are just three things to notice—the true wealth, the testing of the wealth, and the discovery at last of the preciousness of the wealth.

I. Peter pits against each other faith that has been tried, and 'gold that perisheth'; he puts away all the other points of comparison and picks out one, and that is that the one lasts and the other does not. Now I must not be seduced into going beyond the limits of my text to dilate upon the other points of contrast and pre-eminence; but I would just notice in a sentence that everybody admits, yet next to nobody acts upon, the admission that inward good is far more valuable than outward good. 'Wisdom is more precious than rubies,' say people, and yet they will choose the rubies, and take no trouble to get the wisdom. Now the very same principles of estimating value which set cultivated understandings and noble hearts above great possessions and large balances at the bankers, set the life of faith high above all others. And the one thought which Peter wishes to drive into our heads and hearts is that there is only one kind of wealth that will never be separated from its possessor. Nothing is truly ours that remains outside of us.

' 'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands.'

Nothing that is there whilst I am here is really mine. I do not own it if it is possible that I shall lose it. And so with profound meaning our Lord speaks about 'that which is another's in comparison with 'that which is your own.' It is another's because it passes, like quicksilver under pressure, from hand to hand, and no man

really holds it, but it leaps away from his grasp. And if a man retains it all his days, still, according to the grim old proverb, 'shrouds have no pockets,' and when he dies his hands open, or sometimes they clutch together, but there is nothing inside the palms, and they only close upon themselves. Dear brethren, if there is anything that can be filched away from us, anything about which it is true that, on the one hand, 'moth and rust'—natural processes—'do corrupt' it, on the other hand, 'thieves break through and steal'—accidents of human conduct can deprive us of it, then we may *call* it ours, but it is not ours. It possesses us, if we are devoted to it as our best good, and fighting and toiling, and sometimes lying and cheating, and flinging the whole fierce energy of our nature into first gripping and then holding it; it possesses us; we do not possess it. But if there is anything that can become so interwoven and interlaced with the very fibres of a man's heart that they and it cannot be parted, if there is anything that empty hands will clasp the closer, because they *are* emptied of earth's vanities, then that is truly possessed by its possessor. And our faith, which will not be trodden in the grave, but will go with us into the world beyond, and though it be lost in one aspect, in sight, it will be eternal as trust, will be ours, imperishable as ourselves, and as God. Therefore, do not give all the energy of your lives to amassing the second-best riches. Seek the highest things most. 'Covet earnestly the best gifts,' and let the coveting regulate your conduct. And do not be put off with wealth that will fail you sooner or later.

II. Note, again, the testing of the wealth.

I need not dwell upon that very familiar metaphor of the furnace for gold, and the fining-pot for silver, only

remember that there are two purposes for which metallurgists apply fire to metals. The one is to test them, and the other is to cleanse them, or, to use technical words, one is for the purpose of assaying them, and the other is for the purpose of refining them. And so, linking the words of my text with the words of the previous verse, we find that the Apostle lays it down that the purpose of all the diverse trials, or 'temptations' as he calls them, that come to us, is this one thing, that our faith should be 'tried,' and 'found, unto praise and honour and glory.' The fire carries away the dross; it makes the pure metal glow in its lustre. It burns up the 'wood, hay, stubble'; it makes the gold gleam and the precious stones coruscate and flash.

And so note this general notion here of the intention of all life's various aspects being to test character is specialised into this, that it is meant to test faith, first of all. Of course it is meant to test many other things. A man's whole character is tested by the experiences of his daily life, all that is good and all that is evil in him, and we might speak about the effect of life's discipline upon a great many different sides of our nature. But here the whole stress is put upon the effect of life in testing and clarifying and strengthening one part of a Christian's character, and that is his faith. Why does Peter pick out faith? Why does he not say 'trial of your hope,' of your 'love,' of your 'courage,' of half a dozen other graces? Why 'the trial of your *faith*?' For this reason, because as the man's faith is, so is the man. Because faith is the tap-root, in the view of the New Testament, of all that is good and strong and noble in humanity. Because if you strengthen a man's trust you strengthen everything that comes from it. Reinforce the centre

and all is reinforced. Your faith is the vital point from which your whole life as Christians is developed, and whatever strengthens that strengthens you. And, therefore, although everything that befalls you calls for the exercise of, and therefore tests, and therefore, rightly undergone, strengthens a great many various virtues and powers and beauties in a human character, the main good of it all is that it deepens, if the man is right, his simple trust in God manifested by his trust in and love to Jesus Christ; and so it reinforces the faith which works by love, and thus tends to make all things in life good and fair.

Now if thus the main end of life is to strengthen faith, let us remember that we have to give a wider meaning to the word 'trials' than 'afflictions.' Ah! there is as sharp a trial of my faith in prosperity as in any adversity. People say, 'It is easy to trust God when things are going well with us.' That is quite true. But it is a great deal easier to stop trusting God, or thinking about Him, when things are going well with us, and we do not seem to need Him so much, as in the hours of darkness. You remember the old story about the traveller, when the sun and the wind tried which could make him take off his cloak; and the sun did it. Some of us, I daresay, have found out that the faith which gripped God when we felt we needed Him, because we had not anything else but Him, is but too apt to lose hold of Him when fleeting delights and apparent treasures come and whisper invitations in our hearts. There are diseases that are proper to the northern, dark, ice-bound regions of the earth. Yes! and there are a great many more that belong to the tropics; as there is such a thing as sun-stroke, which is, perhaps, as dangerous as the cramping

cold from the icebergs of the north. Some of us should understand what that Scripture means: 'Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God.' Prosperity, untroubled lives, lives even as the lives of those of the majority of mankind now, have their own most searching trials of faith.

But on the other hand, if there are 'ships that have gone down at sea, when heaven was all tranquillity,' there come also dark and nights of wild tempest when we have to lay to and ride out the gale with a tremendous strain on the cable. Our sorrows, our disappointments, our petty annoyances, and the great irrevocable griefs that sooner or later darken the very earth, are all to be classified under this same purpose, 'that the trial of your faith . . . might be found unto praise and honour and glory.' And so, I beseech you, open your eyes to the meaning of life, and do not suppose that you have found the last word to say about it when you say 'I am afflicted,' or 'I am at ease.' The affliction and the ease, like two wheels in some great machine working in opposite directions, fit with their cogs into one another and move something beyond them in one uniform direction. And affliction and ease co-operate to this end, that we might be partakers of His holiness.

I believe experience teaches the most of us, if we will lay its lessons to heart, that the times when Christian people grow most in the divine life is in their times of sorrow. One of the old divines says, 'Grace grows best in winter'; and there are edible plants which need a touch of frost before they are good to eat. So it is with our faith. Only let us take care that the fire does not burn it up, as 'wood, hay, stubble,' but ir-

radiates it and glorifies it, as 'gold, silver, and precious stones.'

III. Now a word, lastly, about the ultimate discovery.

'Might be found unto praise and honour and glory.' Note these three words, which I think are often neglected, and sometimes misunderstood—'praise, honour, glory.' Whose? People sometimes say 'God's,' since His people's ultimate salvation redounds to His praise; but it is much better to understand the praise as given to the Christians whose faith has stood the testing fires. 'Well done, good and faithful servant'—is not that praise from lips, praise from which is praise indeed? As Paul says, 'then shall every man have praise of God.' We are far too much afraid of recognising the fact that Jesus Christ in Heaven, like Jesus Christ on earth, will praise the deeds that come from love to Him, though the deeds themselves may be very imperfect. Do you remember 'She hath wrought a good work on Me,' said about a woman that had done a perfectly useless thing, which was open to a great many very shrewd objections? But Jesus Christ accepted it. Why? Because it was the pure utterance of a loving heart. And, depend upon it, though we have to say 'Unclean! unclean! We are unprofitable servants,' He will say 'Come! ye blessed of My Father.' Praise from Christ is praise indeed.

'Honour.' That suggests bystanders, a public opinion, if I may so say; it suggests 'have thou authority over ten cities,' and that men will have their deeds round them as a halo, in that other world. As 'praise' suggests the redeemed man's relation to his Lord, so 'honour' suggests the redeemed man's relation to the fellow-citizens of the New Jerusalem. 'Glory' speaks of the

man himself as transfigured and lifted up into the light and lustre of communion with, and conformity to, the image of the Lord. 'Then shall we appear with Him in glory. Then shall the righteous blaze forth like the sun in My heavenly Father's Kingdom.

'Shall be found.' Ah! there will be many surprises yonder. Do you remember that profound revelation of our Master when He represents those on whom He lavishes His eulogies as the Judge, as turning to Him and saying, 'Lord! when saw we Thee in . . . prison and visited thee?' They do not recognise themselves or their acts in Christ's account of them. They have found that their lives were diviner than they knew. There will be surprises there. As one of the prophets represents the ransomed Israel, to her amazement, surrounded by clinging troops of children, and asking, 'These! Where have they been? I was left alone,' so many a poor, humble soul, fighting along in this world, having no recognition on earth, and the lowliest estimate of all its own actions, will be astonished at the last when it receives 'praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ.'

JOY IN BELIEVING

'In Whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.'—1 PETER i. 8.

THE Apostle has just previously been speaking about the great and glorious things which are to come to Christians on the appearing of Jesus Christ, and that naturally suggests to him the thought of the condition of believing souls during the period of the Lord's absence and com-

parative concealment. Having lifted his readers' hopes to that great Future, when they would attain to 'praise and honour and glory' at Christ's appearing, he drops to the present and to earth, and recalls the disadvantages and deprivations of the present Christian experience as well as its privileges and blessings. 'Whom having not seen, ye love,' that is a very natural thought in the mind of one whose love to Jesus rested on the ever-remembered blessed experience of years of happy companionship, when addressing those who had no such memories. It points to an entirely unique fact. There is nothing else in the world parallel to that strange, deep personal attachment which fills millions of hearts to this Man who died nineteen centuries ago, and which is utterly unlike the feelings that any men have to any other of the great names of the past. To love one unseen is a paradox, which is realised only in the relation of the Christian soul to Jesus Christ.

Then the Apostle goes on with what might at first seem a mere repetition of the preceding thought, but really brings to view another strange anomaly. 'In Whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.' Love longs for the presence of the beloved, and is restless and defrauded of its gladness so long as absence continues. But this strange love, which is kindled by an unseen Man, does not need His visible presence in order to be a fountain of joy unspeakable and full of glory. Thus the Apostle takes it for granted that every one who believes knows what this joy is. It is a large assumption, contradicted, I am afraid, by the average experience of the people that at this day call themselves Christians.

We notice—

I. The All-sufficient Ground or Source of this Glad Emotion.

‘In whom,’ with all the disabilities and pains and absence, ‘yet believing,’ you can put out a long arm of faith across the gulf that lies, not only between to-day and eighteen centuries ago, but the deeper and more impassible gulf that lies between earth and heaven, and clasp Christ with a really firm grasp, which will fill the hand, and which we shall feel has laid hold of something, or rather has laid hold of a living person and a loving heart. That is faith. The Apostle uses a very strong form of expression here, which is only very partially represented by our English version. He does not say only ‘*in* whom believing,’ but ‘*towards* whom’; putting emphasis upon the effort and direction of the faith, rather than upon the repose of the heart when it has found its object and rests upon Him. And so the conception of the true Christian attitude is that of a continual outgoing of Trust and its child Love; of Desire and its child Possession; and of Expectation and its child Fruition towards that unseen Christ. It is much to believe Him, it is more to believe in Him; it is—I was going to say—most of all to believe towards Him. For in this region, quite as much as, and I think more than, in the one to which the saying was originally applied, ‘search is better than attainment.’ Our condition must always be that of ‘forgetting the things that are behind’; and however much we may realise the union with the unseen Christ in the act of resting upon Him, that must never be suffered to interfere with the longing for the larger possession of myself, and fuller consequent likeness to Him, which is expressed in that great though simple phrase of my text

'believing towards Him.' Such a continual outgoing of effort, as well as the rest and blessedness of reposing on Him, is indispensable for all true gladness. For the intensest activity of our whole being is essential to the real joy of any part of it, and we shall never know the rapture of which humanity, even here and now, is capable until we gather our whole selves, heart, will, and all our practical, as well as our intellectual, powers in the effort to make more of Christ our own, and to minimise the distance between us to a mere vanishing point. 'Believing towards whom ye rejoice.'

That act of trust, however inadequate the object upon which it rests, and however mistaken may be our conceptions of that on which we lean, always brings a gladness which is real, until disappointment disillusionises and saddens us. There is nothing that so sheds peace over the heart as reliance, absolute and quiet, upon some object worthy of trust. It is blessed to trust one another until, as is too often the case, we find that what we thought to be an oak against which we leaned is but a broken reed that has no pith in it, and no possibility of support. So far as it goes, all trust is blessed, but the most blessed is simple reliance upon, and aspiration after, Jesus Christ. Ever to yearn for Him, not with the yearning of those who have no possession, but with that of those who, having a little, desire to have more, is to bring into our lives the one solid and sufficient good without which there is no gladness, and with which there can be no unmingled sorrow, wrapping the whole man in its ebon folds. For this Christ is enough for all my nature and for the satisfaction of every desire. In Him my mind finds the truth; my will the law; my love the answering love; my hope its object; my fears their dis-

sipation; my sins their forgiveness; my weaknesses their strength; and, to all that I am, what He is answers, as fulness to emptiness, and as supply to need. So, 'believing towards Him, we rejoice.'

But note that the joy is strictly contemporaneous with the faith. Tear away electric wire from the source of energy, and the light goes out instantly. It is as another Apostle says, '*in believing*' that we have 'joy and peace.' And that is why so many of us know little of it. Yesterday's faith will not contribute to to-day's gladness, any more than yesterday's meals will satisfy to-day's hunger. Present joy depends upon present faith, and the measure of the one is the measure of the other.

Notice again—

II. The Characteristics of the Christian Gladness.

'Unspeakable,' and, as the word ought to be rendered, not 'full of glory' but 'glorified.' Unspeakable. Still waters run deep. It is poor wealth that can be counted; it is shallow emotion that can be crammed into the narrow limits of any human vocabulary. Fathers and mothers, parents and children, husbands and wives, know that. And the depths of the joy that a believing soul has in Jesus Christ are not to be spoken. Perhaps it is better that it should not be attempted to speak them.

'Not easily forgiven

Are those, who, setting wide the doors that bar
The secret bridal chambers of the heart,
Let in the day.'

It is in shallow streams that the sunlight gleams on the pebbles at the bottom. The abysses of ocean are dark, and have never been searched by its light. I suspect the depth of the emotion which bubbles over into

words, and finds no difficulty in expressing itself. The joy which can be manifested in all its extent has a very small extent. Christian joy is unspeakable, too, because just as you cannot teach a blind man what colour is like, and cannot impart to anybody the blessedness of wedded love, or parental affection, by ever so much talking—and, therefore, the poetry of the world is never exhausted—so there is only one way of conveying to a man what is the actual joy of trusting in Christ, and that is, that he himself should trust Him. We may talk till Doomsday, and then, as the Queen of Sheba said, when she came to Solomon, ‘the half hath not been told.’

‘He must be loved ere that to y,

He will seem worthy of your love.’

It is unspeakable gladness springing from the possession of an unspeakable gift.

‘Glorified.’ There is nothing more ignoble than the ordinary joys of men. They are too often like the iridescent scum on a stagnant pond, fruit and proof of corruption. They are fragile and hollow, for all the play of colour on them, like a soap bubble that breaks of its own tenuity, and is only a drop of dirty water. Joy is too often ignoble, and yet, although it is by no means the highest conception of what Christ’s Gospel can do for us, it is blessed to think that it can take that emotion, so often shameful, so often frivolous, so often lowering rather than elevating, and can lift it into loftiness, and transfigure it, and glorify it and make it a power, a power for good and for righteousness, and for ‘whatsoever things are lovely and of good report’ in our lives. And that is what trusting towards Christ will do for our gladnesses.

Lastly, in one word, let me lay upon your consciences, as Christian people—

III. The Obligation of Gladness.

Peter takes it for granted that all these brethren to whom he is writing have experience of this deep and ennobled joy. He does not say, 'You ought to rejoice,' but he says, 'You do rejoice.' And yet a verse or two before he said, 'Ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations.' So, then, he was not blinking the hard, painful facts of anybody's troubled life. He was not away upon the heights serenely contemptuous of the grim possibilities that lurk down in the dark valleys. He took in all the burdens and the pains and the anxieties and the harassments, and the losses, and the bleeding hearts and the cares that can burden any of us. And he said, in spite of them all, 'Ye rejoice.'

Do you? I am afraid there is no more irrefragable proof of the unreality of an enormous proportion of the Christian profession of this day than the joyless lives—in so far as their religion contributes to their joy—of hosts of us. We have religion enough to make us miserable, we have religion enough to make us uncomfortable about doing things that we would like to do. We are always haunted by the feeling that we are falling so far below our professions, and we are either miserable when we bethink ourselves, or, more frequently, indifferent, accordingly. And the whole reason of such experience lies here, we have not an adequately strong and continued trust in Jesus Christ working righteousness in our lives, nobleness in our characters, and so lifting us above the regions where mists and malaria lie. Let us get high enough up, and we shall find clear sky.

You call yourselves Christians. Does your religion

bring any gladness to you? Does it burn brightest in the dark, like the pillar of cloud before the Israelites? 'Greek fire' burned below the water, and so was in high repute. Our gladness is a poor affair if it is at the mercy of temperaments or of circumstances. Jesus Christ comes to cure temperaments, and to enable us to resist circumstances. So I venture to say that, whatever may be our condition in regard to externals, or whatever may be our tendencies of disposition, we are bound, as a piece of Christian duty, to try to cultivate this joyful spirit, and to do it in the only right way, by cultivating the increase of our faith in Jesus Christ. 'Rejoice in the Lord always'; the man who said that was a prisoner, with death looking into his eyeballs. As he said it, he felt that his friends in Philippi might think the exhortation overstrained, and so he repeated it, to show that he recognised the apparent impossibility of obeying it, and yet deliberately enjoined it; 'and again I say, rejoice.'

CHRIST AND HIS CROSS THE CENTRE OF THE UNIVERSE

'Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently . . . the things which are now reported unto you . . . which things the angels desire to look into.'—1 PETER i. 10, 11, 12.

I HAVE detached these three clauses from their surroundings, not because I desire to treat them fragmentarily, but because we thereby throw into stronger relief the writer's purpose to bring out the identity of the Old and the New Revelation, the fact that Christ and His sufferings are the centre of the world's history, to which all that went before points, from which all that follows after flows; and that not only thus does He stand in the

midst of humanity, but that from Him there ran out influences into other orders of beings, and angels learn from Him mysteries hitherto unknown to them. The prophets prophesy of the grace which comes in the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow, and the same Spirit which taught them teaches the preachers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They that went before had for their deepest message the proclamation, 'He will come'; they that follow after have for their deepest message, 'He has come.' And angels listen to, and echo, the chorus, from all the files that march in front, and all that bring up the rear, 'Hosanna! Blessed be Him that cometh in the name of the Lord.'

My purpose, then, is just to try to bring before you the magnificent unity into which these texts bind all ages, and all worlds, planting Jesus Christ and His Cross in the centre of them all. There are four aspects here in which the writer teaches us to regard this unity: Jesus and the Cross are the substance of prophecy, the theme of Gospel preaching; the study of angels, and presented to each of us for our individual acceptance. Now, let us look briefly at these four points.

I. First, then, Christ and His Cross is the substance of prophecy.

Now, of course, we have to remember that general statements have to be interpreted widely, and without punctilious adherence to the words; and we have also to remember that great mischief has been done, and great discredit cast, on the whole conception of ancient revelation by the well-meaning, but altogether mistaken, attempts of good people to read the fully developed doctrine of Jesus Christ and His sacrifice into every corner of the ancient revelation. But whilst I admit all that, and

would desire to emphasise the fact, I think that in this generation, and to-day, there is a great deal more need to insist upon the truth that the inmost essence and deepest purpose of the whole Old Testament system is to create an attitude of expectance, and to point onwards, with ever-growing distinctness, to one colossal and mysterious figure in which the longings of generations shall be fulfilled, and the promises of God shall be accomplished. The prophet was more than a foreteller, as is being continually insisted upon nowadays. There were prophets who never uttered a single prediction. Their place in Israel was to be the champions of righteousness, and—I was going to say—the knights of God, as against law and ceremonial and externalism. But, beyond that, there underlie the whole system of prophecy, and there come sparkling and flashing up to the surface every now and then, bright anticipations, not only of a future kingdom, but of a personal King, and not only of a King, but a sufferer. All the sacrifices, almost all the institutions, the priesthood and the monarchy included, had this onward-looking aspect, and Israel as a whole, in the proportion in which it was true to the spirit of its calling, stood a-tiptoe, as it were, looking down the ages for the coming of the Hope of the Covenant that had been promised to the fathers. The prophets, I might say, were like an advance-guard sent before some great monarch in his progress towards his capital, who rode through the slumbering villages and called, 'He comes! He comes! The King cometh meek and having salvation,' and then passed on.

Now, all that is to be held fast to-day. I would give all freedom to critical research, and loyally accept the results of it, so far as these are established, and are not

mere hypotheses, with regard to the date and the circumstances of the construction of the various elements of that Old Testament. But what I desire especially to mark is that, with the widest freedom, there must be these two things conserved which Peter here emphasises, the real inspiration of the prophetic order, and its function to point onwards to Jesus. And so long as you keep these truths, as long as you believe that God spoke through prophets, as long as you believe that the very heart of their message was the proclamation of Jesus Christ, and that to bear witness to Him was the function, not only of prophet, but of priest and king and nation, then you are at liberty to deal as you like with mere questions of origin and of date. But if, in the eagerness of the chase after the literary facts of the origin of the Old Testament, we forget that it is a unity, that it is a divine unity, that it is a progressive revelation, and that 'the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy,' then I venture to say that the most uncritical, old-fashioned reader of the Old Testament that found Jesus Christ in the Song of Solomon, and in the details of the Tabernacle, and in all the *minutiæ* of worship and sacrifice, was nearer to the living heart of the thing than the most learned scholar that has been so absorbed in the inquiries as to how and when this, that, and the other bit of the Book was written, that he fails to see the one august figure that shines out, now more and now less dimly, and gives unity to the whole. 'To Him gave all the prophets witness.' And when Peter declared, as he did in my text, that ancient Israel, by its spokesmen and its organs, testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ, he is but echoing what he had learned from his Master, who turns to some of us with the same rebuke

with which He met His disciples after the Resurrection: 'O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.' The Old and the New are a unity, and Christ and His Cross are the substance and the centre of both.

II. Note here Christ and His Cross, the theme of Gospel preaching.

If you will glance at your leisure over the whole context from which I have picked these clauses as containing its essence, you will find that the Apostle speaks of the things which the prophets foretold as being the same as 'those which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the Gospel unto you, with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven.' I must not take for granted that you are all referring to your Bibles, but I should like to point out, as the basis of one or two things that I wish to say, the remarkable variety of phrase employed in the text to describe the one thing. First, Peter speaks of it as 'salvation,' then he speaks of it in the next clause as 'the grace that should come unto you.' Then, in the next phrase, he designates it more particularly as 'the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow.' Now, if we put these designations together—salvation, grace, Christ's sufferings, the subsequent glory—we come to this, that the facts of Christ's life, death, resurrection, and ascension are the great vehicle which brings to men God's grace, that that grace has for its purpose and its effect man's salvation, and that these facts are the Gospel which Christian preachers have to proclaim.

Now notice what follows from such thoughts as these. To begin with, the Gospel is not a speculation, is not a theology, still less a morality, not a declaration of principles, but a history of fact, things that were done on this

earth of ours, and that the Apostle's Creed which is worked into the service of the Anglican Church is far nearer the primitive conception of the Gospel than are any of the more elaborate and doctrinal ones which have followed. For we have to begin with the facts that Christ lived, died, was buried, rose again from the dead . . . ascended into Heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God. Whatever else the Gospel is, that is the kernel and the basis of it all. Out of these facts will come all manner of doctrines, philosophies of religion, theologies, revelations about God and man. Out of them will come all ethics, the teaching of duty, the exhibition of a pattern of conduct, inspiration to follow the model that is set before us. Out of them will come, as I believe, guidance and light for social and economical and political questions and difficulties. But what we have to lay hold of, and what we preachers have to proclaim, is the story of the life, and eminently the story of the death.

Why does Peter put in the very centre here 'the sufferings of Christ'? That suggests another thought, that amongst these facts which, taken together, make the Gospel, the vital part, the central and the indispensable part, is the story of the Cross. Now what Christ said, not what Christ did, not what Christ was, beautiful and helpful as all that is, but to begin with what Christ bore, is the fact that makes the life of the Gospel. And just as He is the centre of humanity, so the Cross is the centre of His work. Why is that? Because the deepest need of all of us is the need to have our sins dealt with, both as guilt and as power, and because nothing else in the whole story of Christ's manifestation deals with men's sins as the fact of His death on the Cross does,

therefore the sacrifice and sufferings are the heart of the Gospel.

And so, brethren, we have to mark that the presentation of Christian truth which slurs over that fact of the Sacrifice and Atonement of Jesus Christ, has parted with the vital power which makes the story into a gospel. It is no gospel to tell a man that Jesus Christ died, unless you go on to say He 'died for our sins according to the Scriptures.' And it is no gospel to talk about the beauty of His life, and the perfectness of His example, and the sweetness of His nature, and the depth, the wisdom, and the tenderness of His words, unless you can say this is 'the Lamb of God,' 'the Word made flesh,' 'who bare our sins, and carried our sicknesses and our sorrows.' Strike out from the gospel that you preach 'the sufferings of Christ,' and you have struck out the one thing that will draw men's hearts, that will satisfy men's needs, that will bind men to Him with cords of love. 'I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me.' So, wherever you get what they call an ethical gospel which deals with moralities, and does not impart the power that will vitalise moralities, and make them into thankful service and sacrifices, in return for the great Sacrifice; wherever you get a gospel that falters in its enunciation of the sufferings of Christ, and wherever you get a gospel that secularises the Christian service of the Sabbath, and will rather discuss the things that the newspapers discuss, and the new books that the reviewers are talking about, and odds and ends of that sort that are thought to be popular and attractive, you get a gospel *minus* the thing that, in the Old Testament and in the New alike, stands forth in the centre of all. 'We preach Christ crucified'; it is not enough to preach Christ. Many a man does

that, and might as well hold his tongue. 'We preach Christ crucified.' And the same august Figure which loomed before the vision of prophets, and shines through many a weary age, stands before us of this generation; ay! and will stand till the end of the world, as the centre, the pivot of human history, the Christ who has died for men. The Christ that will stand in the centre of the development of humanity is the Christ that died on the Cross. If your gospel is not that, you have yet to learn the deepest secret of His power.

III. Once more, here we have Christ and His Cross as the study of angels.

'Which things the angels desire to look into.' Now, the word that Peter employs there is an unusual one in Scripture. Its force may, perhaps, be best conveyed by referring to one of the few instances in which it is employed. It is used to describe the attitude of Peter and John when they stooped down and looked into the sepulchre. Perhaps there may be a reference in Peter's mind to that incident, when he saw the 'two angels . . . sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.' Perhaps, also, there floats in his mind some kind of reference to the outspread wings and bended heads of the brooding cherubim who sat above the Mercy-seat, gazing down upon the miracle of love that was manifested beneath them there. But be that as it may, the idea conveyed is that of eager desire and fixed attention.

Now I am not going to enlarge at all upon the thought that is here conveyed, except just to make the one remark that people have often said, 'Why should a race of insignificant creatures on this little globe of ours be so dignified in the divine procedure as that there should

be the stupendous mystery of the Incarnation, and the Death for their sakes?' *Not* for their sakes only, for the New Testament commits itself to the thought that whilst sinful men are the only subjects of the redeeming grace of Jesus Christ, other orders of creatures do benefit thereby, and do learn from it what else they would not have known, of the mystery and the miracle and the majesty of the Divine love. 'To the principalities and the powers in heavenly places He hath made known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God.' And we can understand how these other orders—what we call higher orders, which they may be or they may not—of being, learn to know God as we learn to know Him, by the manifestation of Himself in His acts, and how the crown of all manifestations consists in this, that He visits the sinful sons of men, and by His own dear Son brings them back again. The elder brethren in the Father's house do not grudge the ring and the robe given to the prodigals; rather they learn therein more than they knew before of the loving-kindness of God.

Now all that is nowadays ignored, and it is not fashionable to speak about the interest of angels in the success of Redemption, and a good many 'advanced' Christians do not believe in angels at all, because they 'cannot verify' the doctrine. I, for my part, accept the teaching, which seems to me to be a great deal more reasonable than to suppose that the rest of the universe is void of creatures that can praise and love and know God. I accept the teaching, and think that Peter was, perhaps, not a dreamer when he said, 'The angels desire to look into these things.' They do not share in the blessings of redemption, but they can behold what they do not themselves experience. The Seer in the Revela-

tion was not mistaken, when he believed that he heard redeemed men leading the chorus to Him that had redeemed them by His blood out of all nations, and then heard the thunderous echo from an innumerable host of angels who could not say 'Thou hast redeemed us,' but who could bring praise and glory to Him because He had redeemed men.

IV. And now my last point is that Christ and His Cross is, by the Gospel, offered to each of us.

Notice how emphatically in this context the Apostle gathers together his wider thoughts, and focusses them into a point. 'The prophets have inquired and searched diligently . . . of the grace that should come to *you*. . . . To them it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but *unto us* they did minister the things, which are now reported *unto you* by them that have preached the Gospel *unto you*.' And so he would take his wide thoughts, as it were, and gather all together, to a point, and press the point against each man's heart.

Dear brethren, these wide views are of no avail to us unless we realise the individual relation which Christ bears to each one of us. He bears a relation, as I have been saying, to all humanity. All the ages belong to Him. 'He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.' From His Cross there flash up rays of light into the heavens above, and out over the whole rolling series of the centuries, from the beginning to the end. Yes; but from His Cross there comes a beam straight to your heart, and the Christ whom angels desire to look into, of whom prophets prophesy and Apostles proclaim His advent, who is the Lord of all the ages, and the Lover of mankind, comes to thee and says 'I am thy Saviour,' and to thee this wide message is brought. Every eye has the whole

sunshine, and each soul may have the whole Christ. His universal relations in time and space matter little to you, unless He has a particular relation to yourself.

And He will never have that in its atoning power, unless you do for yourself and by yourself the most individual and solitary act that a human soul can do, and that is, lay your hand on the head of 'the Lamb . . . that takes away the sin of the world,' and put your sins there. You must begin with 'my Christ,' which you can do only by personal faith. And then afterwards you can come to 'our Christ,' the Christ of all the worlds, the Christ of all the ages. Go to Him by yourself. You must do it as if there were not any other beings in the whole universe but you two, Jesus and you. And when you have so gone, then you will find that you have 'come to the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly, and Church of the first born.' Christ and His Cross are the substance of prophecy, the theme of the Gospel, the study of the angels. What are they to me?

HOPE PERFECTLY

'Wherefore, gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end, for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.'—1 PETER i. 13.

CHRISTIANITY has transformed hope, and given it a new importance, by opening to it a new world to move in, and supplying to it new guarantees to rest on. There is something very remarkable in the prominence given to hope in the New Testament, and in the power ascribed to it to order a noble life. Paul goes so far as to say that we are saved by it. To a Christian it is no longer a

pleasant dream, which may be all an illusion, indulgence in which is pretty sure to sap a man's force, but it is a certain anticipation of certainties, the effect of which will be increased energy and purity. So our Apostle, having in the preceding context in effect summed up the whole Gospel, bases upon that summary a series of exhortations, the transition to which is marked by the 'wherefore' at the beginning of my text. The application of that word is to be extended, so as to include all that has preceded in the letter, and there follows a series of practical advices, the first of which, the grace or virtue which he puts in the forefront of everything, is not what you might have expected, but it is 'hope perfectly.'

I may just remark, before going further, in reference to the language of my text, that, accurately translated, the two exhortations which precede that to hope are subsidiary to it, for we ought to read, 'Wherefore, girding up the loins of your mind, and being sober, hope.' That is to say, these two are preliminaries, or conditions, or means by which the desired perfecting of the Christian hope is to be sought and attained.

Another preliminary remark which I must make is that what is enjoined here has not reference to the duration but to the quality of the Christian hope. It is not 'to the end,' but, as the Margin of the Authorised and the Revised Version concurs in saying, it is 'hope perfectly.'

So, then, there are three things here—the object, the duty, and the cultivation of Christian hope. Let us take these three things in order.

I. The object of the Christian hope.

Now, that is stated, in somewhat remarkable language, as 'the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revela-

tion of Jesus Christ.' We generally use that word 'grace' with a restricted signification to the gifts of God to men here on earth. It is the earnest of the inheritance, rather than its fulness. But here it is quite obvious that by the expression the Apostle means the very same thing as he has previously designated in the preceding context by three different phrases—'an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled,' 'praise and honour and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,' and 'the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.' The 'grace' is not contrasted with the 'glory,' but is another name for the glory. It is not the earnest of the inheritance, but it is the inheritance itself. It is not the means towards attaining the progressive and finally complete 'salvation of your souls,' but it is that complete salvation in all its fulness.

Now, that is an unusual use of the word, but that it should be employed here, as describing the future great object of the Christian hope, suggests two or three thoughts. One is that that ultimate blessedness, with all its dim, nebulous glories, which can only be resolved into their separate stars, when we are millions of leagues nearer to its lustre, is like the faintest glimmer of a new and better life in a soul here on earth, purely and solely the result of the undeserved, condescending love of God that stoops to sinful men, and instead of retribution bestows upon them a heaven. The grace that saved us at first, the grace that comes to us, filtered in drops during our earthly experience, is poured upon us in a flood at last. And the brightest glory of heaven is as much a manifestation of the Divine grace as the first rudimentary germs of a better life now and here. The foundation, the courses of the building, the glittering

pinnacle on the summit, with its golden spire reaching still higher into the blue, is all the work of the same unmerited, stooping, pardoning love. Glory is grace, and Heaven is the result of God's pardoning mercy.

There is another suggestion here to be made, springing from this eloquent use of this term, and that is not merely the identity of the source of the Christian experience upon earth and in the future, but the identity of that Christian experience itself in regard of its essential character. If I may so say, it is all of a piece, homogeneous, and of one web. The robe is without seam, woven throughout of the same thread. The life of the humblest Christian, the most imperfect Christian, the most infantile Christian, the most ignorant Christian here on earth, has for its essential characteristics the very same things as the lives of the strong spirits that move in light around the Throne, and receive into their expanding nature the ever-increasing fulness of the glory of the Lord. Grace here is glory in the bud; glory yonder is grace in the fruit.

But there is still further to be noticed another great thought that comes out of this remarkable language. The words of my text, literally rendered, are 'the grace that is being brought unto you.' Now, there have been many explanations of that remarkable phrase, which I think is not altogether exhausted by, nor quite equivalent to, that which represents it in our version—viz. 'to be brought unto you.' That relegates it all into the future; but in Peter's conception it is, in some sense, in the present. It is 'being brought.' What does that mean? There are far-off stars in the sky, the beams from which have set out from their home of light millenniums since, and have been rushing through the waste places of the

universe since long before men were, and they have not reached our eyes yet. But they are on the road. And so in Peter's conception, the apocalypse of glory, which is the crowning manifestation of grace, is rushing towards us through the ages, through the spheres, and it will be here some day, and the beams will strike upon our faces, and make them glow with its light. So certain is the arrival of the grace that the Apostle deals with it as already on its way. The great thing on which the Christian hope fastens is no 'peradventure,' but a good which has already begun to journey towards us.

Again, there is another thought still to be suggested, and that is, the revelation of Jesus Christ is the coming to His children of this grace which is glory, of this glory which is grace. For mark how the Apostle says, 'the grace which is being brought to you in the revelation of Jesus Christ.' And that revelation to which he here refers is not the past one, in His incarnate life upon earth, but it is the future one, to which the hope of the faithful Church ought ever to be steadfastly turned, the correlated truth to that other one on which its faith rests. On these two great pillars, rising like columns on either side of the gulf of Time, 'He has come,' 'He will come,' the bridge is suspended by which we may safely pass over the foaming torrent that else would swallow us up. The revelation in the past cries out for the revelation in the future. The Cross demands the Throne. That He has come once, a sacrifice for sin, stands incomplete, like some building left unfinished with rugged stones protruding which prophesy an addition at a future day; unless you can add 'unto them that look for Him will He appear the second time without sin unto salvation.' In that

revelation of Jesus Christ His children shall find the glory-grace which is the object of their hope.

So say all the New Testament writers. 'When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory,' says Paul. 'The grace that is to be brought unto you in the revelation of Jesus Christ,' chimes in Peter. And John completes the trio with his 'We know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him.' These three things, brethren—with Christ, glory with Him, likeness to Him—are all that we know, and blessed be God! all that we need to know, of that dim future. And the more we confine ourselves to these triple great certainties, and sweep aside all subordinate matters, which are concealed partly because they could not be revealed, and partly because they would not help us if we knew them, the better for the simplicity and the power and the certainty of our hope. The object of Christian hope is Christ, in His revelation, in His presence, in His communication to us for glory, in His assimilating of us to Himself.

'It is enough that Christ knows all,
And we shall be with Him.'

'The grace that is being brought unto you in the revelation of Jesus Christ.'

II. And now notice the duty of the Christian hope.

Hope a duty? That strikes one as somewhat strange. I very much doubt whether the ordinary run of good people do recognise it as being as imperative a duty for them to cultivate hope as to cultivate any other Christian excellence or virtue. For one man that sets himself deliberately and consciously to brighten up, and to make more operative in his daily life, the hope of future bles-

sedness, you will find a hundred that set themselves to other kinds of perfecting of their Christian character. And yet, surely, there do not need any words to enforce the fact that this hope full of immortality is no mere luxury which a Christian man may add to the plain fare of daily duty or leave untasted according as he likes, but that it is an indispensable element in all vigorous and life-dominating Christian experience.

I do not need to dwell upon that, except just to suggest that such a vividness and continuity of calm anticipation of a certain good beyond the grave is one of the strongest of all motives to the general robustness and efficacy of a Christian life. People used to say a few years ago, a great deal more than they do now, that the Christian expectation of Heaven was apt to weaken energy upon earth, and they used to sneer at us, and talk about our 'other worldliness' as if it were a kind of weakness and defect attached to the Christian experience. They have pretty well given that up now. Anti-Christian sarcasm, like everything else, has its fashions, and other words of reproach and contumely have now taken the place of that. The plain fact is that no man sees the greatness of the present, unless he regards it as being the vestibule of the future, and that this present life is unintelligible and insignificant unless beyond it, and led up to by it, and shaped through it, there lies the eternal life beyond. The low flat plain is dreary and desolate, featureless and melancholy, when the sky above it is filled with clouds. But sweep away the cloud-rack, and let the blue arch itself above the brown moorland, and all glows into lustre, and every undulation is brought out, and tiny shy forms of beauty are found in every corner. And so, if you drape Heaven with the clouds and mists born of indiffer-

ence and worldliness, the world becomes mean, but if you dissipate the cloud and unveil heaven, earth is greatened. If the hope of the grave that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ shines out above all the flatness of earth, then life becomes solemn, noble, worthy of, demanding and rewarding, our most strenuous efforts. No man can, and no man will, strike such effectual blows on things present as the man, the strength of whose arm is derived from the conviction that every stroke of the hammer on things present is shaping that which will abide with him for ever.

My text not only enjoins this hope as a duty, but also enjoins the perfection of it as being a thing to be aimed at by all Christian people. What is the perfection of hope? Two qualities, certainty and continuity. Certainty; the definition of earthly hope is an anticipation of good less than certain, and so, in all the operations of this great faculty, which are limited within the range of earth, you get blended as an indistinguishable throng, 'hopes and fears that kindle hope,' and that too often kill it. But the Christian has a certain anticipation of certain good, and to him memory may be no more fixed than hope, and the past no more unalterable and uncertain than the future. The motto of our hope is not the 'perhaps,' which is the most that it can say when it speaks the tongue of earth, but the 'verily! verily!' which comes to its enfranchised lips when it speaks the tongue of Heaven. Your hope, Christian man, should not be the tremulous thing that it often is, which expresses itself in phrases like 'Well! I do not know, but I tremblingly hope,' but it should say, 'I know and am sure of the rest that remaineth, not because of what I am, but because of what He is.'

Another element in the perfection of hope is its continuity. That hits home to us all, does it not? Sometimes in calm weather we catch a sight of the gleaming battlements of 'the City which hath foundations,' away across the sea, and then mists and driving storms come up and hide it. There is a great mountain in Central Africa which if a man wishes to see he must seize a fortunate hour in the early morning, and for all the rest of the day it is swathed in clouds, invisible. Is that like your hope, Christian man and woman, gleaming out now and then, and then again swallowed up in the darkness? Brethren! these two things, certainty and continuity, are possible for us. Alas! that they are so seldom enjoyed by us.

III. And now one last word. My text speaks about the discipline or cultivation of this Christian hope.

It prescribes two things as auxiliary thereto. The way to cultivate the perfect hope which alone corresponds to the gift of God is 'girding up the loins of your mind, and being sober.' Of course, there is here one of the very few reminiscences that we have in the Epistles of the *ipsissima verba* of our Lord. Peter is evidently referring to our Lord's commandment to have 'the loins girt and the lamps burning, and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord.' I do not need to remind you of the Eastern dress that makes the metaphor remarkably significant, the loose robes that tangle a man's feet when he runs, that need to be girded up and belted tight around his waist, as preliminary to all travel or toil of any kind. The metaphor is the same as that in our colloquial speech when we talk about a man 'pulling himself together.' Just as an English workman will draw his belt a hole tighter when he has some special task to do, so Peter

says to us, make a definite effort, with resolute bracing up and concentration of all your powers, or you will never see the grace that is hurrying towards you through the centuries. There are abundance of loose, slack-braced people up and down the world, in all departments, and they never come to any good. It is a shame that any man should have his thoughts so loosely girt and vagrant as that any briar by the roadside can catch them and hinder his advance. But it is a tenfold shame for Christian people, with such an object to gaze upon, that they should let their minds be dissipated all over the trivialities of Time, and not gather them together and project them, as I may say, with all their force towards the sovereign realities of Eternity. A sixpence held close to your eye will blot out the sun, and the trifles of earth close to us will prevent us from realising the things which neither sight, nor experience, nor testimony reveal to us, unless with clenched teeth, so to speak, we make a dogged effort to keep them in mind.

The other preliminary and condition is 'being sober,' which of course you have to extend to its widest possible signification, implying not merely abstinence from, or moderate use of, intoxicants, or material good for the appetites, but also the withdrawing of one's self some times wholly from, and always restraining one's self in the use of, the present and the material. A man has only a given definite quantity of emotion and interest to expend, and if he flings it all away on the world he has none left for Heaven. He will be like the miller that spoils some fair river, by diverting its waters into his own sluice, in order that he may grind some corn. If you have the faintest film of dust on the glass of the telescope, or on its mirror, if it is a reflecting one, you will

not see the constellations in the heavens; and if we have drawn over our spirits the film of earthly absorption, all these bright glories above will, so far as we are concerned, cease to be.

So, brethren, there is a solemn responsibility laid upon us by the gift of that great faculty of looking before and after. What did God make you and me capable of anticipating the future for? That we might let our hopes run along the low levels, or that we might elevate them and twine them round the very pillars of God's Throne; which? I do not find fault with you because you hope, but because you hope so meanly, and about such trivial and transitory things. I remember I once saw a sea-bird kept in a garden, confined within high walls, and with clipped wings, set to pick up grubs and insects. It ought to have been away out, hovering over the free ocean, or soaring with sunlit wing to a height where earth became a speck, and all its noises were hushed. That is what some of you are doing with your hope, degrading it to earth instead of letting it rise to God; enter within the veil, and gaze upon the glory of the 'inheritance incorruptible and undefiled.'

THE FAMILY LIKENESS

'As He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy, in all manner of conversation.'—
1 PETER i. 15.

THAT is the sum of religion—an all-comprehensive precept which includes a great deal more than the world's morality, and which changes the coldness of that into something blessed, by referring all our purity to the Lord that called us. One may well wonder where a Galilean

fisherman got the impulse that lifted him to such a height; one may well wonder that he ventured to address such wide, absolute commandments to the handful of people just dragged from the very slough and filth of heathenism to whom he spoke. But he had dwelt with Christ, and they had Christ in their hearts. So for him to command and for them to obey, and to aim after even so wide and wonderful an attainment as perfecting like God's was the most natural thing in the world. 'Be ye holy as He that hath called you is holy, and that in all manner of conversation.' The maximum of possible attainment, the minimum of imperative duty!

So, then, there are three things here—the pattern, the field, and the inspiration or motive of holiness.

I. The Pattern of Holiness.

'As He that hath called you is holy.' God's holiness is the very attribute which seems to separate Him most from the creatures; for its deepest meaning is His majestic and Divine elevation above all that is creatural. But here, of course, the idea conveyed by the word is not that, if I may so say, metaphysical one, but the purely moral one. The holiness of God which is capable of imitation by us is His separation from all impurity. There is a side of His holiness which separates Him from all the creatures, to which we can only look up, or bow with our faces in the dust; but there is a side of His holiness which, wonderful as it is, and high above all our present attainment as it is, yet is not higher than the possibilities which His indwelling Spirit puts within our reach, nor beyond the bounds of the duty that presses upon us all. 'As He which hath called you is holy.' Absolute and utter purity is His holiness, and that is the pattern for us.

Religion is imitation. The truest form of worship is

to copy. All through heathenism you find that principle working. 'They that make them are like unto them.' Why are heathen nations so besotted and sunken and obstinate in their foulnesses? Because their gods are their examples, and they, first of all, make the gods after the pattern of their own evil imaginations, and then the evil imaginations, deified, react upon the maker and make him tenfold more a child of hell than themselves. Worship is imitation, and there is no religion which does not necessarily involve the copying of the example or the pattern of that Being before whom we bow. For religion is but love and reverence in the superlative degree, and the natural operation of love is to copy, and the natural operation of reverence is the same. So that the old Mosaic law, 'Be ye holy as I am holy,' went to the very heart of religion. And the New Testament form of it, as Paul puts it in a very bold word, 'Be ye *imitators* of God, as beloved children,' sets its seal on the same thought that we are religious in the proportion in which we are consciously copying and aspiring after God.

But then, says somebody or other, 'it is not possible.' Well, if it were not possible, try it all the same. For in this world it is aim and not attainment that makes the noble life; and it is better to shoot at the stars, even though your arrow never reaches them, than to fire it along the low levels of ordinary life. I do not see that however the unattainableness of the model may be demonstrated, that has anything to do with the duty of imitation. Because, though absolute conformity running throughout the whole of a life is not possible here on earth, we know that in each individual instance in which we came short of conformity the fault was ours, and it might have been otherwise. Instead of bewildering our-

selves with questions about 'unattainable' or 'attainable,' suppose we asked, at each failure, 'Why did I not copy God *then*; was it because I could not, or because I would not?' The answer would come plain enough to knock all that sophisticated nonsense out of our heads, and to make us feel that the law which puts an unattainable ideal before the Christian as his duty is an intensely practical one, and may be reduced to practice at each step in his career. Imitation of the Father, and to be perfect, 'as our Father in heaven is perfect,' is the elementary and the ultimate commandment of all Christian morality. 'Be ye holy as He that hath called you is holy.'

Then let me remind you that the unattainableness is by no means so demonstrable as some people seem to think. A very tiny circle may have the same centre as one that reaches beyond the suburbs of the universe, and holds all stars and systems within its great round. And the tiniest circle will have the same geometrical laws applied to it as the greatest. The difference between finite and infinite has nothing to do with the possibility of our becoming like God, if we believe that 'in the image of God created He him'; and that men who have been not only made by original creation in the Divine image, but have been born again by the incorruptible seed of the Word into a kindred life with His, and derived from Him, can surely grow like what they have got, and unfold into actually possessed and achieved resemblance to their Father the kindred life that is poured into their veins.

So every way it is better indefinitely to approximate to that great likeness, though with many flaws and failures, than to say it cannot be reached, and so I will content myself down here, in my sins and my meannesses. No! dear brethren, 'we are saved by hope,' and one prime

condition of growth in nobleness is to believe it possible that, by His blessing we may be like Him here on earth in the measure of our perception of His beauty and reception of His grace.

II. Again, notice the field of this Godlike holiness.

‘In all manner of conversation.’ Of course I do not need to remind you that the word ‘conversation’ does not mean *talk*, but *conduct*; that it applies to the whole of the outward life. Peter says that every part of the Christian man’s activity is to be the field on which his possession of the holiness derived from and like God’s is to be exhibited. It is to be seen in all common life. Here is no cloistered and ascetic holiness which taboos large provinces of every man’s experience, and says ‘we must not go in there, for fear of losing our purity,’ but rather wherever Christ has trod before we can go. That is a safe guide, and whatever God has appointed there we can go and that we can do. ‘On the bells of the horses shall be written *Holiness to the Lord*.’ The horse-bells that make merry music on their bridles are not very sacred things, but they bear the same inscription as flamed on the front of the high priest’s mitre; and the bowls in every house in Jerusalem, as the prophet says, shall bear the same inscription that was written on the sacrificial vessels, and all shall belong to Him.

Only, whilst thus we maintain the possibility of exhibiting Godlike holiness in all the dusty fields of common life, let us remember the other side.

In this day there is very little need to preach against an ascetic Christianity. There has been enough said of late years about a Christian man being entitled to go into all fields of occupation and interest, and there to live his Christianity. I think the time is about come for

a caution or two to be dropped on the other side. 'Blessed is he that condemneth not himself in the thing which he alloweth.' Apply this commandment vigorously and honestly to trade, to recreation—especially to recreation—to social engagements, to the choice of companions, to the exercise of tastes. Ask yourselves 'Can I write *Holiness to the Lord* on them?' If not, do not have anything to do with them. I wonder what the managers of theatres and music-halls would say if anybody proposed that motto to be put upon the curtain for the spectators to read before it is drawn up for the play. Do you think it would fit? Don't you, Christian men and women, don't you go into places where it would not fit. And remember that 'in all manner of conversation' has two sides to it, one declaring the possibility of sanctifying every creature of God, and one declaring the impossibility of a Christian man going, without dreadful danger and certain damage, into places where he cannot carry that consecration and purity with him.

Again the field is all trivial things. 'In all manner of conversation.' There is nothing that grows so low but that this scythe will travel near enough to the ground to harvest it. There is nothing so minute but it is big enough to mirror the holiness of God. The tiniest grain of mica, upon the face of the hill, is large enough to flash back a beam; and the smallest thing we can do is big enough to hold the bright light of holiness. 'All'! Ah! If our likeness to God does not show itself in trifles, what in the name of common sense is there left for it to show itself in? For our lives are all made up of trifles. The great things come three or four of them in the seventy years; the little ones come every time the clock ticks. And as they say, 'Take care of the pence, and the pounds

will take care of themselves.' If we keep the little things rigidly under the dominion of this principle, no doubt the big things will fall under it too, when they emerge. And if we do not—as the old Jewish book says:—'He that despiseth little things shall fall by little and little.' Whosoever has not a Christianity that sanctifies the trifles has a Christianity that will not sanctify the crises of his life. So, dear brother, this motto is to be written over every portal through which you and I go; and whatsoever we can put our hands to, in it we may magnify and manifest the holiness of God.

III. Now, lastly, note the motive or inspiration of holiness.

The language of my text might read like 'the Holy One who hath called you.' Peter would stir his hearers to the emulation of the Divine holiness by that thought of the bond that unites Him and them. 'He hath called you.' In which word, I suppose, he includes the whole sum of the Divine operations which have resulted in the placing of each of his auditors within the circle of the Christian community as the subjects of Christ's grace, and not only the one definite act to which the theologians attach the name of 'calling.' In the briefest possible way we may put the motive thus—the inspiration of imitation is to be found in the contemplation of the gifts of God. What He has said and done to me, calling me out of my darkness and alienation and lavishing the tokens of His love, the voice of His beseechings, the monitions of His Spirit, the message of His Son, the Incarnate Word, and invitation of God—all these things are included in His call. And all of them are the reasons why, bound by thankfulness, overcome by his forbearance, responding to His entreaties, and glued to Him by the strength of the hand

that holds us, and the tenacity of His love, we should strive to 'walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called.'

And not only so, but in the thought of the Divine calling there lies a fountain of inspiration when we remember the purpose of the calling. As Paul puts it in one of his letters: 'God has not called us to uncleanness but to holiness.' That to which He summons, or invites (for you may use either word), is holiness like His own. That is the crown of all His purposes for men, the great goal and blessed home to which He would lead us all.

And so, if in addition to the fact of His 'gift and calling' and all that is included within it, if in addition to the purpose of that calling we further think of the relation between us and Him which results from it, so as that we, as the next verse says, call Him who hath called us, 'Our Father,' then the motive becomes deeper and more blessed still. Shall we not try to be like the Father of our spirits, and seek for His grace, to bear the likeness of sons?

My text speaks only of effort, let us not forget that the truest way to be partakers of His holiness is to open our hearts for the entrance of the Spirit of His Son, and possessing that—having these promises and that great fulfilment of them—then to perfect holiness in the fear and love of the Lord.

FATHER AND JUDGE

'If ye call on Him as Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.'—1 PETER i. 17.

'If ye call on Him as Father,' when ye pray, say, 'Our Father which art in heaven.' One can scarcely help supposing that the Apostle is here, as in several other places in his letter, alluding to words that are stamped ineffaceably upon his memory, because they had dropped from Christ's lips. At all events, whether there is here a distinct allusion to what we call the Lord's Prayer or no, it is here recognised as the universal characteristic of Christian people that their prayers are addressed to God in the character of Father. So that we may say that there is no Christianity which does not recognise and rejoice in appealing to the paternal relationship.

But, then, I suppose in Peter's days, as in our days, there were people that so fell in love with one aspect of the Divine nature that they had no eyes for any other; and who so magnified the thought of the Father that they forgot the thought of the Judge. That error has been committed over and over again in all ages, so that the Church as a whole, one may say, has gone swaying from one extreme to the other, and has rent these two conceptions widely apart, and sometimes has been foolish enough to pit them against each other instead of doing as Peter does here, braiding them together as both conspiring to one result, the production in the Christian heart of a wholesome awe. If ye call on Him as Father 'who, without respect of persons, judgeth according to

every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning in fear.'

So then, look at this twofold aspect of God's character.

Both these conceptions ought to be present, flamingly and vividly, burning there before him, to every Christian man. 'Ye call Him Father,' but the Father is the Judge. True, the Judge is Father, but Peter reminds us that whatever blessed truths may be hived in that great Name of Father, to be drawn thence by devout meditation and filial love, there is not included in it the thought of weak-minded indulgence to His children, in any of their sins, nor any unlikelihood of inflicting penal consequences on a rebellious child. 'Father' does not exclude 'Judge,' 'and without respect of persons He judgeth.'

'Without respect of persons'—the word is a somewhat unusual New Testament one, but it has special appropriateness and emphasis on Peter's lips. Do you remember who it was that said, and on what occasion he said it: 'Now I perceive that God is no respecter of persons'? It was Peter when he had learned the lesson on the housetop at Joppa, looking out over the Mediterranean, and had it enforced by Cornelius' message. The great thought that had blazed upon him as a new discovery on that never-be-forgotten occasion, comes before him again, and this unfamiliar word comes with it, and he says, 'without respect of persons He judges.' Mountains are elevated, valleys are depressed and sunken, but I fancy that the difference between the top of Mount Everest and the gorge through which the Jordan runs would scarcely be perceptible if you were standing on the sun. Thus, 'without respect of persons,' great men and little, rich men and poor, educated men and illiterate, people that

perch themselves on their little stools and think themselves high above their fellows: they are all on one dead level in the eye of the Judge. And this question is as to the quality of the work and not as to the dignity of the doer. 'Without respect of persons' implies universality as well as impartiality. If a Christian man has been ever so near God, and then goes away from Him, he is judged notwithstanding his past nearness. And if a poor soul, all crusted over with his sins and leprous with the foulness of long-standing iniquity, comes to God and asks for pardon, he is judged according to his penitence, 'without respect of persons.' That great hand holds an even balance. And though the strictness of the judicial process may have its solemn and its awful aspect, it has also its blessed and its comforting one.

Now, do not run away with the notion that the Apostle is speaking here of that great White Throne and the future judgment that for many of us lies, inoperative on our creeds, on the other side of the great cleft of death. That is a solemn thought, but it is not Peter's thought here. If any of you can refer to the original, you will see that even more strongly than in our English version, though quite sufficiently strongly there, the conception is brought out of a continuous Divine judgment running along, all through a man's life, side by side with his work. The judgment here meant is not all clotted together, as it were, in that final act of judgment, leaving the previous life without it, but it runs all through the ages, all through each man's days. I beseech you to ponder that thought, that at each moment of each of our lives an estimate of the moral character of each of our deeds is present to the Divine mind.

'Of course we believe that,' you say. 'That is com-

monplace; not worth talking about.' Ah! but because we believe it, as of course, we slip out of thinking about it and letting it affect our lives. And what I desire to do for you, dear friends, and for myself, is just to put emphasis on the one half of that little word 'judgeth,' and ask you to take its three last letters and lay them on your minds. Do we feel that, moment by moment, these little spurs of bad temper, these little gusts of worldliness, that tiny, evanescent sting of pride and devildom which has passed across or been fixed in our minds, are all present to God, and that He has judged them already, in the double sense that He has appraised their value and estimated their bearing upon our characters, and that He has set in motion some of the consequences which we shall have to reap?

Oh! one sometimes wishes that people did not so much believe in a future judgment, in so far as it obscures to them the solemn thought of a present and a continuous one. 'Verily, there is a God that *judgeth* in the earth,' and, of course, all these provisional decisions, which are like the documents that in Scotch law are said to 'pre-cognosce the case,' are all laid away in the archives of heaven, and will be produced, docketed and in order, at the last for each of us. Christian people sometimes abuse the doctrine of justification by faith as if it meant that Christians at the last were not to be judged. But they are, and there is such a thing as 'salvation yet so as by fire,' and such a thing as salvation in fulness. Do not let filial confidence drive out legitimate fear.

He 'judges according to every man's work.' I do not think it is extravagant attention to niceties to ask you to notice that the Apostle does not say 'works,' but 'work'; as if all the separate actions were gathered into

a great whole, as indeed they are, because they are all the products of one mind and character. The trend and drift, so to speak, of our life, rather than its isolated actions and the underlying motives, in their solemn totality and unity, these are the materials of this Divine judgment.

Now, let me say a word about the disposition which the Apostle enjoins upon us in the view of these facts.

The Judge is the Father, the Father is the Judge. The one statement proclaims the merciful, compassionate, paternal judgment, the other the judicial Fatherhood. And what comes from the combination of these two ideas, which thus modify and illuminate one another? 'Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.' What a descent that sounds from the earlier verses of the letter: 'In whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.' Down from those heights of 'joy unspeakable,' and 'already glorified,' the apostle drops plump into *this* dungeon: 'Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.' Of course, I need not remind you that the 'fear' here is not the 'fear which hath torment'; in fact, I do not think that it is a fear that refers to God at all. It is not a sentiment or emotion of which God is the object. It is not the reverent awe which often appears in Scripture as 'the fear of God,' which is a kind of shorthand expression for all modes of devout sentiment and emotion; but it is a fear, knowing our own weakness and the strong temptations that are round us, of falling into sin. That is the one thing to be afraid of in this world. If a man rightly understood what he is here for, then the only thing that he would be terrified for would be that he should miss

the purpose of his being here and lose his hold of God thereby. There is nothing else worth being afraid of, but that *is* worth being afraid of. It is not slavish dread, nor is it cowardice, but the well-grounded emotion of men that know themselves too well to be confident and know the world too well to be daring and presumptuous.

Don't you think that Peter had had a pretty rough experience in his life that had taught him the wisdom of such an exhortation? And does it not strike you as very beautiful that it should come, of all people in the world, from his lips? The man that had said, 'Though all should forsake Thee, yet will not I.' 'Why cannot I follow Thee now?' 'Bid me come to Thee on the water.' 'This be far from Thee, Lord, it shall not be unto Thee'—the man that had whipped out his sword in the garden, in a spasm of foolish affection, now, in his quiet old age when he has learnt the lesson of failures and follies and sins and repentance, says in effect: 'Remember me, and do not you be presumptuous.' 'Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.' 'If I had known myself a little better, and been a little more afraid of myself, I should not have made such a fool of myself or such shipwreck of my faithfulness.'

Dear friends, no mature Christian is so advanced as that he does not need this reminder, and no Christian novice is so feeble as that, keeping obedient to this precept, he will not be victorious over all his evils. The strongest needs to fear; the weakest, fearing, is safe. For such fearfulness is indispensable to safety. It is all very well to go along with sail extended and a careless look-out. But if, for instance, a captain keeps such when he is making the mouth of the Red Sea where there are

a narrow channel and jagged rocks and a strong current, if he has not every man at his quarters and everything ready to let go and stop in a moment, he will be sure to be on the reefs before he has tried the experiment often. And the only safety for any of us is ever to be on the watch, and to dread our own weakness. 'Blessed is the man that feareth always.'

Such carefulness over conduct and heart is fully compatible with all the blessed emotions to which it seems at first antagonistic. There is no discord between the phrase that I have quoted about 'joy unspeakable and full of glory,' and this temper, but rather the two help one another. And such blended confidence and fear are the parents of courage. The man that is afraid that he will do wrong and so hurt himself and grieve his Saviour, is the man that will never be afraid of anything else. Martyrs have gone to the stake 'fearing not them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do,' because they were so afraid to sin against God that they were not afraid to die rather than to do it. And that is the temper that you and I should have. Let that one fear, like Moses' rod, swallow up all the other serpents and make our hearts impervious to any other dread.

'Pass the time of your *sojourning*.' You do not live in your own country, you are in an alien land. You are passing through it. Troops on the march in an enemy's country, unless they are led by an idiot, will send out clouds of scouts in front and on the wings to give timeous warning of any attempted assault. If we cheerily and carelessly go through this world as if we were marching in a land where there were no foes, there is nothing before us but defeat at the last. Only let us remember that sleepless watchfulness is needed only in this time of so-

journing, and that when we get to our own country there is no need for such patrols and advance guards and rear-guards and men on the flank as were essential when we were on the march. People that grow exotic plants here in England keep them in glass houses. But when they are taken to their native soil the glass would be an impertinence. As long as we are here we have to wear our armour, but when we get yonder the armour can safely be put off and the white robes that had to be tucked up under it lest they should be soiled by the muddy ways can be let down, for they will gather no pollution from the golden streets. The gates of that city do not need to be shut, day nor night. For when sin has ceased and our liability to yield to temptation has been exchanged for fixed adhesion to the Lord Himself, then, and not till then, is it safe to put aside the armour of godly fear and to walk, unguarded and unarmed, in the land of perpetual peace.

PURIFYING THE SOUL

‘... ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren.’—1 PETER i. 22.

NOTE these three subsidiary clauses introduced respectively by ‘in,’ ‘through,’ ‘unto.’ They give the means, the Bestower, and the issue of the purity of soul. The Revised Version, following good authorities, omits the clause, ‘through the Spirit.’ It may possibly be originally a marginal gloss of some scribe who was nervous about Peter’s orthodoxy, which finally found its way into the text. But I think we shall be inclined to retain it if we notice that, throughout this epistle, the writer is fond

of sentences on the model of the present one, and of surrounding a principal clause with subsidiary ones introduced by a similar sequence of prepositions. For instance, in this very chapter, to pass over other examples, we read, 'Kept by' (or in) 'the power of God through faith unto salvation.' So, for my present purpose, I take the doubtful words as part of the original text. They unquestionably convey a true idea, whether they are genuine here or no.

One more introductory remark—'Ye have purified your souls'—a bold statement to make about the vast multitude of the 'dispersed' throughout all the provinces of Asia Minor whom the Apostle was addressing. The form of the words in the original shows that this purifying is a process which began at some definite point in the past and is being continued throughout all the time of Christian life. The hall-mark of all Christians is a relative purity, not of actions, but of soul. They will vary, one from another; the conception of what is purity of soul will change and grow, but, if a man is a Christian, there was a moment in his past at which he potentially, and in ideal, purified his spirit, and that was the moment when he bowed down in obedience to the truth. There are suggestions for volumes about the true conception of soul-purity in these words of my text. But I deal with them in the simplest possible fashion, following the guidance of these significant little words which introduce the subordinate clauses.

First of all, then, we have here the great thought that

I. Soul purity is in, or by, obedience.

Now, of course, 'the truth'—truth with the definite article—is the sum of the contents of the Revelation of

God in Jesus Christ, His life, His death, His Glory. For to Peter, as to us He should be, Jesus Christ was Truth Incarnate. 'In Him were hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.' The first thought that is suggested to me from this expression—obedience to the truth—is that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is, as its ultimate intention, meant to be obeyed. There are plenty of truths which have no influence on life and conduct, for which all is done that they can demand when they are accepted. But *the* truth is no inert substance like the element which recent chemical discoveries have found, which is named 'argon,' the do-nothing; *the* truth is, as physiologists say, a ferment. It is intended to come into life, and into character, and into the inmost spirit of a man, and grip them, and mould them, and transform them, and animate them, and impel them. The truth is to be 'obeyed.'

Now that altogether throws over two card-castles which imperfect Christians are very apt to build. One which haunted the thoughts of an earlier generation of Christians more than it does the present, is that we have done all that 'the truth' asks of us when we have intellectually endorsed it. And so you get churches which build their membership upon acceptance of a creed and excommunicate heretics, whilst they keep do-nothing and uncleansed Christians within their pale. But God does not tell us anything that we may know. He tells us in order that, knowing, we may be and do. And right actions, or rather a character which produces such, is the last aim of all knowledge, and especially of all moral and religious truth. So 'the truth' is not 'argon'; it is a ferment. And if men, steeped to the eyebrows in orthodoxy, think that they have done enough when they have set their hands

to a confession of faith, and that they are Christians because they can say, 'all this I steadfastly believe,' they need to remember that religious truth which does not mould and transform character and conduct is a king dethroned; and for dethroned kings there is a short step between the throne from which they have descended and the scaffold on which they die.

But there is another—what I venture to call a card-castle, which more of us build in these days of indifference as to creed—and that is that a great many of us are too much disposed to believe that 'the truth as it is in Jesus' has received from us all which it expects when we trust to it for what we call our 'salvation,' meaning thereby forgiveness of sins and immunity from punishment. These are elements of salvation unquestionably, but they are only part of it. And the very truths on which Christian people rest for this initial salvation, which is forgiveness and acceptance, are meant to be the guides of our lives and the patterns for our imitation. Why, in this very letter, in reference to the very parts of Christ's work, on which faith is wont to rest for salvation,—the death on the Cross to which we say that we trust, and which we are so accustomed to exalt as a unique and inimitable work that cannot be reproduced and needs no repetition, world without end—Peter has no hesitation in saying that Christ was our 'Pattern,' and that, even when He went to the Cross, He died 'leaving us an example that we should follow in His steps.' So, brethren, the truth needs to be known and believed: the truth needs not only to be believed but to be trusted in; the truth needs not only to be believed and to be trusted in, but to be obeyed.

Still further, another thought following upon and to

some extent modifying the preceding one, is suggested here, and that is that the faith, which I have just been saying is sometimes mistakenly regarded as being all that truth calls for from us, is itself obedience. As I have said, the language in the original here implies that there was a given definite moment in the past when these dispersed strangers obeyed, and, by obeying the truth, purified their souls. What was that moment? Some people would say the moment when the rite of baptism was administered. I would say the moment when they bowed themselves in joyful acceptance of the great Word and put out a firm hand of faith to grasp Jesus Christ. That is obedience. For, in the very act of thus trusting, there is self-surrender, is there not? Does not a man depart from himself and bow himself humbly before his Saviour when he puts his trust in Him? Is not the very essence of obedience, not the mere external act, but the melting of the will to flow in such directions as His master-impulse may guide it? Thus, faith in its depth is obedience; and the moment when a man believes, in the deepest sense of the word, that moment, in the deepest realities of his spirit, he becomes obedient to the will and to the love of his Saviour Lord, Who is the Truth as He is the Way and the Life. We find, not only in this Epistle, but throughout the Epistles, that the two words 'disobedience' and 'unbelief,' are used as equivalents. We read, for instance, of those that 'stumble at the word, being disobedient,' and the like. So, then, faith is obedience in its depth, and, if our faith has any vitality in it, it carries in it the essence of all submission.

But then, further, my text implies that the faith which is, in its depth, obedience, in its practical issues will produce the practical obedience which the text enjoins. It is

no mere piece of theological legerdemain which counts that faith is righteousness. But, just as all sin comes from selfishness, so, and therefore, all righteousness will flow from giving up self, from decentralising, as it were, our souls from their old centre, self, and taking a new centre, God in Christ. Thus the germ of all practical obedience lies in vital faith. It is, if I might so say, the mother-tincture which, variously combined, coloured, and perfumed, makes all the precious things, the virtues and graces of humanity, which the believing soul pours out as a libation before its God. It is the productive energy of all practical goodness. It is the bottom heat in the greenhouse which makes all the plants grow and flourish. Faith is obedience, and faith produces obedience. Does my faith produce obedience? If it does not, it is not faith.

Then, with regard to this first part of my subject, comes the final thought that practical obedience works inwards as well as outwards, and purifies the soul which renders it. People generally turn that round the other way, and, instead of saying that to do right helps to make a man right within, they say 'make the tree good, and its fruit good'—first the pure soul, and then the practical obedience. Both statements are true. For every act that a man does reacts upon the doer, just as, whether the shot hits the target or not, the gun kicks back on the shoulder of the man that fired it. Conduct comes from character, but conduct works back upon character, and character is largely the deposit from the vanished seas of actions. So, then, whilst the deepest thought is, be good and you will do good, it is not to be forgotten that the other side is true—do good, and it will tend to make you good. Obedience purifies the soul, while, on the other hand, a man that lives ill comes to

think as he lives, and to become tenfold more a child of evil. 'The dyer's hand is subdued to what it works in.' 'Ye have purified your souls,' ideally, in the act of faith, and continuously, in the measure in which you practically obey the truth.

We have here

II. Purifying through the Spirit.

I have already said that these words are possibly no part of the original text, but that they convey a true Christian idea, whether the words are here genuine or no. I need not enlarge upon this part of my subject at any length. Let me just remind you how the other verse in this chapter, to which I have already referred as cast in the same mould as our text, covers, from a different point of view, the same ground exactly as our text. Here there is put first the human element: 'Ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth,' and secondly the Divine element; 'through the Spirit.' The human part is put in the foreground, and God's part comes in, I was going to say, subordinately, as a condition. The reverse is the case in the other text, which runs: 'Kept *in* the power of God *through* faith'—where the Divine element is in the foreground, as being the true cause, and the human dwindles to being merely a condition—'Kept by' (or in) 'the power of God through faith.' Both views are true; you may take the vase by either handle. When the purpose is to stimulate to action, man's part is put in the foreground and God's part secondarily. When the purpose is to stimulate to confidence, God's part is put in the foreground and the man's is secondary. The two interlock, and neither is sufficient without the other.

The true Agent of all purifying is that Divine Spirit.

I have said that the moment of true trust is the moment of initial obedience, and of the beginning of purity. And it is so because, in that moment of initial faith, there enters into the heart the communicated Divine life of the Spirit, which thenceforward is lodged there, except it be quenched by the man's negligence or sin. Thence, from that germ implanted in the moment of faith, the germ of a new life, there issue forth to ultimate dominion in the spirit, the powers of that Divine Spirit which make for righteousness and transform the character. Thus, the true cause and origin of all Christian nobility and purity of character and conduct lies in that which enters the heart at the moment that the heart is opened for the coming of the Lord. But, on the other hand, this Divine Spirit, the Source of all purity, will not purify the soul without the man's efforts. 'Ye have purified your souls.' You need the Spirit indeed. But you are not mere passive recipients. You are to be active co-operators. In this region, too, we are 'labourers together with God.' We cannot of ourselves do the work, for the very powers with which we do it, or try to do it, are themselves in need of cleansing. And for a man to try to purify the soul by his own effort alone is to play the part of the sluttish house-wife who would seek to wipe a dish clean with a dirty cloth. You need the Divine Spirit to work in you, and you need to use, by your own effort, the Divine Spirit that does work in you. He is as 'rushing, mighty wind'; but, unless the sails are set and the helm gripped, the wind will pass the boat and leave it motionless. He is Divine fire that burns up the dross and foulness; but, unless we 'guard the holy fire' and feed it, it dies down into grey cold ashes. He is the water of life; but, un-

less we dig and take heed to keep clear the channels, no refreshing will permeate to the roots of the wilting flowers, and there will be dryness, thirst, and barrenness, even on the river's banks.

So, brethren, neither God alone nor man alone can purify the soul. We need Him, else we shall labour in vain. He needs us, else He will bestow His gift, and we shall receive 'the grace of God in vain.'

Lastly, we have here—

III. Purifying . . . unto . . . love.

The Apostle was speaking to men of very diverse nationalities who had been rent asunder by deep gulfs of mutual suspicion and conflicting interests and warring creeds, and a great mysterious, and, as it would seem to the world then, utterly inexplicable bond of unity had been evolved amongst them, and Greek and barbarian, bond and free, male and female, had come together in amity. The 'love of the brethren' was the creation of Christianity, and was the outstanding fact which, more than any other, amazed the beholders in these early days. God be thanked! there are signs in our generation of a closer drawing together of Christian people than many past ages, alas, have seen.

But my text suggests solemn and great thoughts with regard to Christian love and unity. The road to unity lies through purity, and the road to purity lies through obedience. Yes; what keeps Christian people apart is their impurities. It is not their creeds. It is not any of the differences that appear to separate them. It is because they are not better men and women. Globules of quicksilver will run together and make one mass; but not if you dust them over. And it is the impurities on the quicksilver that keep us from coalescing.

So then we have to school ourselves into greater conformity to the likeness of our Master, to conquer selfishness, and to purify our souls, or else all this talk about Christian unity is no better than sounding brass, and more discordant than tinkling cymbals. Let us learn the lesson. 'The unfeigned love of the brethren' is not such an easy thing as some people fancy, and it is not to be attained at all on the road by which some people would seek it. Cleanse yourselves, and you will flow together.

Here, then, we have Peter's conception of a pure soul and a pure life. It is a stately building, based deep on the broad foundation of the truth as it is in Jesus; its walls rising, but not without our effort, being builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit, and having as the shining apex of its heaven-pointing spire 'unfeigned love to the brethren.' The measure of our obedience is the measure of our purity. The measure of our purity is the measure of our brotherly love. But that love, though it is the very aim and natural issue of purity, still will not be realised without effort on our part. Therefore my text, after its exhibition of the process and issues of the purifying which began with faith, glides into the exhortation: 'See that ye love one another with a pure heart'—a heart purified by obedience—and that 'fervently.'

LIVING STONES ON THE LIVING FOUNDATION STONE

'To Whom coming, as unto a living stone . . . ye also, as living stones, are built up.'
—1 PETER ii. 4, 5.

I WONDER whether Peter, when he wrote these words, was thinking about what Jesus Christ said to him long ago, up there at Caesarae Philippi. He had heard from Christ's lips, 'Thou art Peter, and on this rock I will build My Church.' He had understood very little of what it meant then. He is an old man now, years of experience and sorrow and work have taught him the meaning of the words, and he understands them a great deal better than his so-called successors have done. For we may surely take the text as the Apostle's own disclaimer of that which the Roman Catholic Church has founded on it, and has blazoned it, in gigantic letters round the dome of St. Peter's, as meaning. It is surely legitimate to hear him saying in these words: 'Make no mistake, it is Jesus Himself on whom the Church is built. The confession of Him which the Father in heaven revealed to me, not I, the poor sinner who confessed it—the Christ whom that confession set forth, He is the foundation stone, and all of you are called and honoured to ring out the same confession. Jesus is the one Foundation, and we all, apostles and humble believers, are but stones builded on Him.' Peter's relation to Jesus is fundamentally the same as that of every poor soul that 'comes to' Him.

Now, there are two or three thoughts that may very well be suggested from these words, and the first of them is this:—

I. Those that are in Christ have perpetually to make the effort to come nearer Christ.

Remember that the persons to whom the Apostle is speaking are no strangers to the Saviour. They have been professing Christians from of old. They have made very considerable progress in the Divine life; they are near Jesus Christ; and yet Peter says to them, 'You can get nearer if you try,' and it is your one task and one hope, the condition of all blessedness, peace, and joy in your religious life that you should perpetually be making the effort to come closer, and to keep closer, to the Lord, by whom you say that you live.

What is it to come to Him? The context explains the figurative expression, in the very next verse or two, by another and simpler word, which strips away the figure and gives us the plain fact—'in Whom believing.' The act of the soul by which I, with all my weakness and sin, cast myself on Jesus Christ, and grapple Him to my heart, and bind myself with His strength and righteousness—that is what the Apostle means here. Or, to put it into other words, this 'coming,' which is here laid as the basis of everything, of all Christian prosperity and progress for the individual and for the community, is the movement towards Christ of the whole spiritual nature of a man—thoughts, loves, wishes, purposes, desires, hopes, will. And we come near to Him when day by day we realise His nearness to us, when our thoughts are often occupied with Him, bring His peace and Himself to bear as a motive upon our conduct, let our love reach out its tendrils towards, and grasp, and twine round Him, bow our wills to His commandment, and in everything obey Him. The distance between heaven and earth does part us, but the distance between

a thoughtless mind, an unrenewed heart, a rebellious will, and Him, sets between Him and us a greater gulf, and we have to bridge that by continual honest efforts to keep our wayward thoughts true to Him and near Him, and to regulate our affections that they may not, like runaway stars, carry us far from the path, and to bow or stubborn and self-regulating wills beneath His supreme commandment, and so to make all things a means of coming nearer the Lord with whom is our true home.

Christian men, there are none of us so close to Him but that we may be nearer, and the secret of our daily Christian life is all wrapped up in that one word which is scarcely to be called a figure, 'coming' unto Him. That nearness is what we are to make daily efforts after, and that nearness is capable of indefinite increase. We know not how close to His heart we can lay our aching heads. We know not how near to His fulness we may bring our emptiness. We have never yet reached the point beyond which no closer union is possible. There has always been a film—and, alas! sometimes a gulf—between Him and us, His professing servants. Let us see to it that the conscious distance diminishes every day, and that we feel ourselves more and more constantly near the Lord and intertwined with Him.

II. Those who come near Christ will become like Christ.

'To Whom coming, as unto a living stone, ye also as living stones.' Note the verbal identity of the expressions with which Peter describes the Master and His servants. Christ is the Stone—that is Peter's interpretation of 'on this *rock* will I build My Church.' There is a reference, too, no doubt, to the many Old Testament

prophecies which are all gathered up in that saying of our Lord's. Probably both Jesus and Peter had in mind Isaiah's 'stone of stumbling,' which was also a 'sure corner-stone, and a tried foundation.' And words in the context which I have not taken for consideration, 'disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious,' plainly rest upon the 118th Psalm, which speaks of 'the stone which the builders rejected' becoming 'the head of the corner.'

But, says Peter, He is not only the foundation Stone, the corner Stone, but a *living* Stone, and he does not only use that word to show us that he is indulging in a metaphor, and that we are to think of a person and not of a thing, but in the sense that Christ is eminently and emphatically the living One, the Source of life.

But, when he turns to the disciples, he speaks to them in exactly the same language. They, too, are 'living stones,' because they come to the 'Stone' that is 'living.' Take away the metaphor, and what does this identity of description come to? Just this, that if we draw near to Jesus Christ, life from Him will pass into our hearts and minds, which life will show itself in kindred fashion to what it wore in Jesus Christ, and will shape us into the likeness of Him *from* whom we draw our life, because *to* Him we have come. I may remind you that there is scarcely a single name by which the New Testament calls Jesus Christ which Jesus Christ does not share with us His younger brethren. By that Son we 'receive the adoption of sons.' Is He the Light of the world? We are lights of the world. And if you look at the words of my text, you will see that the offices which are attributed to Christ in the New Testament are gathered up in those which the Apostle here ascribes to Christ's

servants. Jesus Christ in His manhood was the Temple of God. Jesus Christ in His manhood was the Priest for humanity. Jesus Christ in His manhood was the sacrifice for the world's sins. And what does Peter say here? 'Ye are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices.' You draw life from Jesus Christ if you keep close to Him, and that life makes you, in derived and subordinate fashion, but in a very real and profound sense, what Jesus Christ was in the world. The whole blessedness and secret of the gifts which our Lord comes to bestow upon men may be summed up in that one thought, which is metaphorically and picturesquely set forth in the language of my text, and which I put into plainer and more prosaic English when I say—they that come near Christ become as Christ. As 'living stones' they, too, share in the life which flows from Him. Touch Him, and His quick Spirit passes into our hearts. Rest upon that foundation-stone and up from it, if I may so say, there is drawn, by strange capillary attraction, all the graces and powers of the Saviour's own life. The building which is reared upon the Foundation is cemented to the Foundation by the communication of the life itself, and, coming to the living Rock, we, too, become alive.

Let us keep ourselves near to Him, for, disconnected, the wire cannot carry the current, and is only a bit of copper, with no virtue in it, no power. Attach it once more to the battery and the mysterious energy flashes through it immediately. 'To Whom coming,' because He lives, 'ye shall live also.'

III. Lastly:

They who become like Christ because they are near Him, thereby grow together.

'To whom coming, as unto a living stone, ye also, as living stones, are built up.' That building up means not only the growth of individual graces in the Christian character, the building up in each single soul of more and more perfect resemblance to the Saviour, but from the context it rather refers to the welding together, into a true and blessed unity, of all those that partake of that common life. Now, it is very beautiful to remember, in this connection, to whom this letter was written. The first words of it are: 'To the strangers *scattered abroad* throughout,' etc. etc. All over Asia Minor, hundreds of miles apart, here one there another little group, were these isolated believers, the scattered stones of a great building. But Peter shows them the way to a true unity, notwithstanding their separation. He says to them in effect: 'You up in Bithynia, and you others away down there on the southern coast, though you never saw one another, though you are separated by mountain ranges and weary leagues; though you, if you met one another, perhaps could not understand what you each were saying, if you "come unto the living Stone, ye as living stones are built up" into one.' There is a great unity into which all they are gathered who, separated by whatever surface distinctions, yet, deep down at the bottom of their better lives, are united to Jesus Christ.

But there may be another lesson here for us, and that is, that the true and only secret of the prosperity and blessedness and growth of a so-called Christian congregation is the individual faithfulness of its members, and their personal approximation of Jesus Christ. If we here, knit together as we are nominally for Christian worship, and by faith in that dear Lord, are true to our

profession and our vocation, and keep ourselves near our Master, then we shall be built up; and if we do not, we shall not.

So, dear friends, all comes to this: *There* is the Stone laid; it does not matter how *close* we are lying to it, it will be nothing to us unless we are *on* it. And I put it to each of you, Are you built on the Foundation, and from the Foundation do you derive a life which is daily bringing you nearer to Him, and making you liker Him? All blessedness depends, for time and for eternity, on the answer to that question. For remember that, since that living Stone is laid, it is *something* to you. Either it is the Rock on which you build, or the Stone against which you stumble and are broken. No man, in a country evangelised like England—I do not say Christian, but evangelised—can say that Jesus Christ has no relation to, or effect upon, him. And certainly no people that listen to Christian preaching, and know Christian truth as fully and as much as you do, can say it. He is the Foundation on which we can rear a noble, stable life, if we build upon Him. If He is not the Foundation on which I build, He is the Stone on which I shall be broken.

SPIRITUAL SACRIFICES

‘ . . . Spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.’—1 PETER ii. 5.

IN this verse Peter piles up his metaphors in a fine profusion, perfectly careless of oratorical elegance or propriety. He gathers together three symbols, drawn from ancient sacrificial worship, and applies them all to Christian people. In the one breath they are ‘temples,’ in the next ‘priests,’ in the third ‘sacrifices.’ All

the three are needed to body out the whole truth of the relationship of the perfect universal religion—which is Christianity—to the fragmentary and symbolical religion of ancient time.

Christians individually and collectively are temples, inasmuch as they are 'the habitation of God through the Spirit.' They are priests by virtue of their consecration, their direct access to God, their function of representing God to men, and of bringing men to God. They are sacrifices, inasmuch as one main part of their priestly function is to offer themselves to God.

Now, it is very difficult for us to realise what an extraordinary anomaly the Christian faith presented at its origin, surrounded by religions which had nothing to do with morality, conduct, or spiritual life, but were purely ritualistic. And here, in the midst of them, started up a religion bare and bald, and with no appeal to sense, no temple, no altar, no sacrifice. But the Apostles with one accord declare that they had all these things in far higher form than those faiths possessed them, which had only the outward appearance.

Now, this conception of the sacrificial element in the Christian life runs through the whole New Testament, and is applied there in a very remarkable variety of forms. I have taken the words of my text, not so much to discourse upon them especially. My object now is rather to gather together the various references to the Christian life as essentially sacrificial, and to trace the various applications which that idea receives in the New Testament. There are four classes of these, to which I desire especially to refer.

I. There is the living sacrifice of the body.

'I beseech you, by the mercies of God, that ye *present*'

—which is a technical word for a priest's action—'your bodies a living sacrifice,' in contrast with the slaying, which was the presentation of the animal victim. Now, that 'body' there is not equivalent to self is distinctly seen when we notice that Paul goes on, in the very next clause, to say, 'and be transformed by the renewing of your *mind*.' So that he is speaking, not of the self, but of the corporeal organ and instrument of the self, when he says 'present your *bodies* a living sacrifice.'

Of course, the central idea of sacrifice is surrender to God; and, of course, the place where that surrender is made is the inmost self. The will is the man, and when the will bows, dethroning self and enthroning God, submitting to His appointments, and delighting to execute His commandments, then the sacrifice is begun. But, inasmuch as the body is the organ of the man's activity, the sacrifice of the will and of self must needs come out into visibility and actuality in the aggregate of deeds, of which the body is the organ and instrument. But there must first of all be the surrender of my inmost self, and only then, and as the token and outcome of that, will any external acts, however religious they may seem to be, come into the category of sacrifice when they express a conscious surrender of myself to God. 'The flesh profiteth nothing,' and yet the flesh profiteth much. But here is the order that another of the Apostles lays down: 'Yield *yourselves* to God,' and then, 'your members as instruments of righteousness to Him.'

To speak of the sacrifice of the body as a living sacrifice suggests that it is not the slaying of any bodily appetite or activity that is the true sacrifice and worship, but the hallowing of these. It is a great deal easier, and it is sometimes necessary, to cut off the offending

right hand, to pluck out the offending right eye, or, putting away the metaphor, to abstain rigidly from forms of activity which are perfectly legitimate in themselves, and may be innocuous to other people, if we find that they hurt us. But that is second best, and though it is better in the judgment of common sense to go into life maimed than complete to be cast into hell-fire, it is better still to go into life symmetrical and entire, with no maiming in hand or organ. So you do not offer the living sacrifice of the body when you annihilate, but when you suppress, and direct, and hallow its needs, its appetites, and its activities.

The meaning of this sacrifice is that the whole active life should be based upon, and be the outcome of, the inward surrender of self unto God. 'On the bells of the horses shall be written, Holiness to the Lord, and every pot and vessel in Jerusalem shall be holy as the bowls upon the altar'—in such picturesque and yet profound fashion did an ancient prophet set forth the same truth that lies in this declaration of our Apostle, that the body, the instrument of our activities, should be a living sacrifice to God. Link all its actions with Him; let there be conscious reference to Him in all that I do. Let foot and hand and eye and brain work for Him, and by Him, and in constant consciousness of His presence; suppress where necessary, direct always, appetites and passions, and make the body the instrument of the surrendered spirit. And then, in the measure in which we can do so, the greatest cleft and discord in human life will be filled, and body, soul, and spirit will harmonise and make one music of praise to God.

Ah! brethren, these bad principles have teeth to bite very close into our daily lives. How many of us, young

and old, have 'fleshly lusts which war against the soul'? How many of you young men have no heart for higher, purer, nobler things, because the animal in you is strong! How many of you find that the day's activities blunt you to God! How many of us are weakened still under that great antagonism of the flesh lusting against the spirit, so that we cannot do the things that we would! Sensuality, indulgence in animal propensities, yielding to the clamant voices of the beast that is within us—these things wreck many a soul; and some of those that are listening to me now. Let the man govern and coerce the animal, and let God govern the man. 'I beseech you that you yield your bodies a living sacrifice.'

II. There is the sacrifice of praise.

Of course, logically and properly, this, and all the others that I am going to speak about, are included within that to which I have already directed attention. But still they are dealt with separately in Scripture, and I follow the guidance. We read in the Epistle to the Hebrews: 'By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise unto God continually—that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks unto His name.' There, then, is another of the regions into which the notion of sacrifice as the very essence of Christian life is to be carried.

There is nothing more remarkable in Scripture than the solemn importance that it attaches to what so many people think so little about, and that is *words*. It even sometimes seems to take them as being more truly the outcome and revelation of a man's character than his deeds are. And that is true, in some respects. But at all events there is set forth, ever running all through the Scripture, that thought, that one of the best sacrifices that men can make to God is to render up the trib-

ute of their praise. In the great psalm which lays down with clearness never surpassed in the New Testament the principles of true Christian worship, this is declared: 'Whoso offereth praise glorifieth Me.' The true offering is not the slaying of animals or the presentation of any material things, but the utterance of hearts welling up thankfulness. In the ancient ritual there stood within the Holy place, and after the altar of burnt-offering had been passed, three symbols of the relation of the redeemed soul to God. There was the great candlestick, which proclaimed 'Ye are the light of the world.' There was the table on which the so-called shewbread was laid, and in the midst there was the altar of incense, on which, day by day, morning and evening, there was kindled the fragrant offering which curled up in wreaths of blue smoke aspiring towards the heavens. It lay smouldering all through the day, and was quickened into flame morning and evening. That is a symbol representing what the Christian life ought to be—a continual thank-offering of the incense of prayer and praise.

Nor that only, brethren, but also there is another shape in which our words should be sacrifices, and that is in the way of direct utterances to men, as well as of thanksgiving to God. What a shame it is, and what a confession of imperfect, partial redemption and regeneration on the part of professing Christians it is, that there are thousands of us who never, all our lives, have felt the impulse or necessity of giving utterance to our Christian convictions! You can talk about anything else; you are tongue-tied about your religion. Why is that? You can make speeches upon political platforms, or you can discourse on many subjects that interest you. You never speak a word to anybody about the Master that you say

you serve. Why is that? 'What is bred in the bone comes out in the flesh.' What is deep in the heart sometimes lies there unuttered, but more often demands expression. I venture to think that if your Christianity was deeper, it would not be so dumb. You strengthen your convictions by speech. A man's belief in anything grows incalculably by the very fact of proclaiming it. And there is no surer way to lose moral and spiritual convictions than to huddle them up in the secret chambers of our hearts. It is like a man carrying a bit of ice in his palm. He locks his fingers over it, and when he opens them it has all run out and gone. If you want to deepen your Christianity, declare it. If you would have your hearts more full of gratitude, speak your praise. There used to be in certain religious houses a single figure kneeling on the altar-steps, by day and by night, ever uttering forth with unremitting voice, the psalm of praise. That perpetual adoration in spirit, if not in form, ought to be ours. The fruit of the lips should continually be offered. Literally, of course, there cannot be that unbroken and exclusive utterance of thanksgiving. There are many other things that men have to talk about; but through all the utterances there ought to spread the aroma—like some fragrance diffused through the else scentless air from some unseen source of sweetness—of that name to which the life is one long thanksgiving.

III. There is the sacrifice of help to men.

The same passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews, to which I have already referred, goes on to bracket together the sacrifice of praise and of deeds. It continues thus:—'But to do good and to communicate forget not.' Again I say, logically this comes under the first division.

But still it may be treated separately, and it just carries this thought—your praying and singing praises are worse than useless unless you go out into the world an embodiment and an imitation of the love which you hymn. True philanthropy has its roots in true religion. The service of man is the service of God.

That principle cuts two ways. It comes as a sharp test of their prayers and psalm-singing to emotional Christians, who are always able to gush in words of thankfulness, and it confronts them with the question, What do you do for your brother? That is a question that comes very close to us all. Do not talk about being the priests of the Most High God unless you are doing the priestly office of representing God to men, and carrying to them the blessings that they need. Your service to God is worthless unless it is followed by diligent, fraternal, wise, self-sacrificing service for men.

The same principle points in another direction. If, on the one hand, it crushes as hypocrisy a religion of talk, on the other hand it declares as baseless a philanthropy which has no reference to God. And whilst I know that there are many men who, following the dictates of their hearts, and apart altogether from any reference to higher religious sanctions, do exercise pity and compassion and help, I believe that for the basing of a lasting, wide, wise benevolence, there is nothing solid and broad except Christ and Him crucified, and the consciousness of having been—sinful and needy as we are—received and blessed by Him. Let the philanthropists learn that the surrender of self, and the fruit of the lips giving thanks to His name, must precede the highest kind of beneficence. Let the Christian learn that benevolence is the garb in which religion is dressed.

'True worship and undefiled . . . is this, to visit the widow and the fatherless in their affliction.' Morality is the dress of Religion; Religion is the body of Morality.

IV. Lastly, there is the sacrifice of death.

'I am ready to be offered,' says the Apostle—to be *poured out*, as a libation. And again, 'If I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice with you all.' And so may

'Death the endless mercies seal,
And make the sacrifice complete.'

It may become not a reluctant being dragged out of life whilst we cling to it with both our hands. It may be not a reluctant yielding to necessity, but a religious act, in which a man resignedly and trustfully and gratefully yields himself to God; and says, 'Father! into Thy hands I commit my spirit.'

Ah! brethren, is not that a better way to die than to be like some poor wretch in a stream, that clutches at some unfixed support on the bank, and is whirled away down, fiercely resisting and helpless? We may thus make our last act an act of devotion, and go within the veil as priests bearing in our hands the last of our sacrifices. The sacrifice of death will only be offered when a life of sacrifice has preceded it. And if you and I, moved by the mercies of God, yield ourselves living sacrifices, using our lips for His praise and our possessions for man's help, then we may die as the Apostle expected to do, and feel that by Christ Jesus even death becomes 'an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing unto God.'

MIRRORS OF GOD

'... That ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness . . .'-1 PETER ii. 9.

THE *Revised Version*, instead of 'praises,' reads *excellencies*—and even that is but a feeble translation of the remarkable word here employed. For it is that usually rendered 'virtues'; and by the word, of course, when applied to God, we mean the radiant excellencies and glories of His character, of which our earthly qualities, designated by the same name, are but as shadows.

It is, indeed, true that this same expression is employed in the Greek version of the Old Testament in Isaiah xliii. in a verse which evidently was floating before Peter's mind. 'This people have I formed for Myself; they shall show forth My praise.'

But even while that is admitted, it is to be observed that the expression here does not merely mean that the audible praise of God should be upon the lips of Christian people, but that their whole lives should, in a far deeper sense than that, be the manifestation of what the Apostle here calls 'excellencies of God.'

I. Here we get a wonderful glimpse into the heart of God.

Note the preceding words, in which the writer describes all God's mercies to His people, making them 'a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation'; a people 'His own possession.' All that is done for one specific purpose—'that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness.' That is to say, the very aim of all God's gracious manifesta-

tions of Himself is that the men who apprehend them should go forth into the world and show Him for what He is.

Now that aim may be, and often has been, put so as to present an utterly hard and horrible notion. That God's glory is His only motive may be so stated as to mean nearly an Almighty Selfishness, which is far liker the devil than God. People in old days did not always recognise the danger that lay in such a representation of what we call God's motive for action. But if you think for a moment about this statement, all that appears hard and repellent drops clean away from it, and it turns out to be another way of saying, 'God is Love.' Because, what is there more characteristic of love than an earnest desire to communicate itself and to be manifested and beheld? And what is it that God reveals to the world for His own glory but the loftiest and most wondrous compassion, that cannot be wearied out, that cannot be provoked, and the most forgiving Omnipotence, that, in answer to all men's wanderings and rebellions, only seeks to draw them to itself? That is what God wants to be known for. Is *that* hard and repellent? Does that make Him a great tyrant, who only wants to be abjectly worshipped? No; it makes Him the very embodiment and perfection of the purest love. Why does He desire that He should be known? for any good that it does to Him? No; except the good that even His creatures can do to Him when they gladden His paternal heart by recognising Him for what He is, the Infinite Lover of all souls.

But the reason why He desires, most of all, that the light of His character may pour into every heart is because He would have every heart gladdened and blessed

for ever by that received and believed light. So the hard saying that God's own glory is His supreme end melts into 'God is Love.' The Infinite desires to communicate Himself, that by the communication men may be blessed.

II. There is another thing here, and that is, a wonderful glimpse of what Christian people are in the world for.

'This people have I formed for Myself,' says the fundamental passage in Isaiah already referred to, 'they shall show forth My praise.' It was not worth while forming them except for that. It was still less worth while redeeming them except for that.

But you may say, 'I am saved in order that I may enjoy all the blessings of salvation, immunities from fear and punishment, and the like.' Yes! Certainly! But it that all? Or is it the main thing? I think not. There is not a creature in God's universe so tiny, even although you cannot see it with a microscope, but that it has a claim on Him that made it for its well-being. That is very certain. And so my salvation—with all the blessedness for me that lies wrapped up and hived in that great word—my salvation is an adequate end with God, in all His dealing, and especially in His sending of Jesus Christ.

But there is not a creature in the whole universe, though he were mightier than the archangels that stand nearest God's throne, who is so great and independent that his happiness and well-being is the sole aim of God's gifts to him. For every one of us the Apostle means the word, 'No man liveth to himself'—he could not if he were to try—'and no man dieth to himself.' Every man that receives anything from God is thereby made a

steward to impart it to others. So we may say—and I speak now to you who profess to be Christians—‘you were not saved for your own sakes.’ One might almost say that that was a by-end. You were saved—shall I say?—for God’s sake; and you were saved for man’s sake? Just as when you put a bit of leaven into a lump of dough, each grain of the lump, as it is leavened and transformed, becomes the medium for passing on the mysterious transforming influence to the particle beyond, so every one of us, if we have been brought out of darkness into marvellous light, have been so brought, not only that we may recreate and bathe our own eyes in the flooding sunshine, but that we may turn to our brothers and ask them to come too out of the doleful night into the cheerful, gladsome day. Every man that Jesus Christ conquers on the field He sends behind Him, and says, ‘Take rank in My army. Be My soldier.’ Every yard of line in a new railway when laid down is used to carry materials to make the next yard; and so the terminus is reached. Even so, Christian people were formed for Christ that they might show forth His praise.

Look what a notion that gives us of the dignity of the Christian life, and of the special manifestation of God which is afforded to the world in it. You, if you love as you ought to do, are a witness of something far nobler in God than all the stars in the sky. You, if you set forth as becomes you His glorious character, have crowned the whole manifestation that He makes of Himself in Nature and in Providence. What people learn about God from a true Christian is a better revelation than has ever been made or can be made elsewhere. So the Bible talks about principalities and powers in heav-

only places who have had nobody knows how many millenniums of intercourse with God, nobody knows how deep and intimate, learning from Christian people the manifold wisdom which had folds and folds in it that they had never unfolded and never could have done. 'Ye are My witnesses,' saith the Lord. Sun and stars tell of power, wisdom, and a whole host of majestic attributes. We are witnesses that 'He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength.' Who was it that said

' 'Twas great to speak a world from naught,
'Tis greater to redeem?'

'Ye are saved that ye may show forth the praise of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.'

III. Lastly, we have here a piece of stringent practical direction.

All that I have been saying thus far refers to the way in which the very fact of a man's being saved from his sin is a revelation of God's mercy, love, and restoring power. But there are two sides to the thought of my text; and the one is that the very existence of Christian people in the world is a standing witness to the highest glory of God's name; and the other is that there are characteristics which, as Christian men, we are bound to put forth, and which manifest in another fashion the excellencies of our redeeming God.

The world takes its notions of God, most of all, from the people who say that they belong to God's family. They read us a great deal more than they read the Bible. They *see* us; they only *hear* about Jesus Christ. 'Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image' nor any like-

ness of the Divine, but thou shalt make *thyself* an image of Him, that men looking at it may learn a little more of what He is. If we have any right to say that we are a royal priesthood, a chosen nation, God's 'possession,' then there will be in us some likeness of Him to whom we belong stamped more or less perfectly upon our characters; and just as people cannot look at the sun, but may get some notion of its power when they gaze upon the rare beauty of the tinted clouds that lie round about it, if, in the poor, wet, cold mistiness of our lives there be caught, as it were, and tangled some stray beams of the sunshine, there will be colour and beauty there. A bit of worthless tallow may be saturated with a perfume which will make it worth its weight in gold. So our poor natures may be drenched with God and give Him forth fragrant and precious, and men may be drawn thereby. The witness of the life which is Godlike is the duty of Christian men and women in the world, and it is mainly what we are here for.

Nor does that exclude the other kind of showing forth the praises, by word and utterance, at fit times and to the right people. We are not all capable of that, in any public fashion; we are all capable of it in some fashion. There is no Christian that has not somebody to whom their words—they may be very simple and very feeble—will come as nobody else's words can. Let us use these talents and these opportunities for the Master.

But, above all, let us remember that none of these works—either the involuntary and unconscious exhibition of light and beauty and excellencies caught from Him; or the voluntary and vocal proclamations of the name of Him from whom we have caught them—can be done to any good purpose if any taint of self mingles

with it. 'Let your light so shine before men that they may behold your good works and glorify'—whom? you?—'your *Father* which is in heaven.'

The harp-string gives out its note only on condition that, being touched, it vibrates, and ceases to be visible. Be you unseen, transparent, and the glory of the Lord shall shine through you.

CHRIST THE EXEMPLAR

'For ever hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps.'—1 PETER ii. 21.

THESE words are a very striking illustration of the way in which the Gospel brings Christ's principles to bear upon morals and duty. The Apostle is doing nothing more than exhorting a handful of slaves to the full and complete and patient acceptance of their hard lot, and in order to teach a very homely and lowly lesson to the squalid minds of a few captives, he brings in the mightiest of all lessons by pointing to the most beautiful, most blessed, and most mysterious fact in the world's history—the cross of Christ. It is the very spirit of Christianity that the biggest thing is to regulate the smallest duties of life. Men's lives are made up of two or three big things and a multitude of little ones, and the greater rule the lesser; and, my friends, unless we have got a religion and a morality that can and will keep the trifles of our lives right there will be nothing right; unless we can take those deepest truths, make them the ruling principles, and lay them down side by side with the most trivial things of our lives, we are something short. Is there nothing in your life or mine so small

that we cannot bring it into captivity and lift it into beauty by bringing it into connection with saving grace? Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example. This is the first thing that strikes me, and I intend it also by way of introduction. Look how the Apostle has put the points together, as though there are two aspects which go together and cannot be rendered apart, like the under side and the upper side of a coin. 'Christ also suffered for us,' and so for us says all the orthodox. 'Leaving us an example'—there protests all the heretics. Yes, but we know that there is a power in both of them, and the last one is only true when we begin with the first. He suffered for us. There, there, my friends, is the deepest meaning of the cross, and if you want to get Christ for an example, begin with taking Him as the sacrifice, for He gave His life for you. Don't part the two things. If you believe Him to be Christ, then you take Him at the cross: if you want to see the meaning of Christ as an example, begin with Him as your Saviour. 'Because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that ye should follow His steps.' These are the words, and what God hath joined together let no man put asunder. With these few remarks I shall deal with the words a little more exhaustively, and I see in them three things—the sufferings of Christ our gain, the sufferings of Christ our pattern, and the suffering of Christ our power to imitate.

And first of all that great proclamation which underlies the whole matter—Christ also suffered for us. The sufferings of Christ are thereby our gain. I shall not dwell on the larger questions which these words naturally open for us, and I shall content myself with some of the angles and side views of thought, and one to begin

with is this: It is very interesting to notice how, as his life went on, and his inspiration became more full, this Apostle got to understand, as being the very living and heart centre of his religion, the thing which at first was a stumbling-block and mystery to him. You remember when Christ was here on earth, and was surrounded by all His disciples, the man who actually led antagonism to the thought of a saving Messiah, was this very Apostle Peter. How he displayed his ignorance in the words, 'This shall not be unto Thee, O Lord'; and you remember also how his audacity rose to the height of saying, 'Why cannot I follow Thee now, Lord? I will lay down my life for Thy sake,' so little did he understand the purposes of Christ's suffering and Christ's death. And even after His resurrection we don't find that Peter in his early preaching had got as far as he seems to have got in this letter from which my text is taken. You will notice that in this letter he speaks a great deal about the sufferings of Christ, which he puts side by side and in contrast with God's glorifying of His Son. Christ's cross, which at first had come to him as a rejection, has now come to him in all its reality, and to him there was the one grand thing, 'He suffered for us,' as though he realises Christ in all His beauty and purity, and not only as a beautiful teacher and dear friend. That which at first seemed to him as an astounding mystery and perfect impossibility, he now comes to understand. With those two little words, 'for us,' where there was before impossibility, disappointment, and anomaly, the anomaly vanishes, although the mystery becomes deeper. In one sense it was incomprehensible; in another sense it was the only explanation of the fact. And, my friends, I want you to build one thought on this.

Unless you and I lay hold of the grand truth that Jesus Christ died for us, it seems to me that the story of the Gospel and the story of the cross is the saddest and most depressing page of human history. That there should have been a man possessed of such a soul, such purity, such goodness, such tenderness, such compassion, and such infinite mercy—if there were all this to do nothing but touch men's hearts and prick and irritate them into bitter enmity—if the cross were the world's wages to the world's best Teacher, and nothing more could be said, then, my friends, it seems to me that the hopes of humanity have, in the providence of God, suffered great disaster, and a terrible indictment stands against both God and man. Oh, yes, the death of Jesus Christ, and the whole history of the world's treatment of Him, is an altogether incomprehensible and miserable thing—a thing to be forgotten, and a thing to be wept over in tears of blood, and no use for us unless we do as Peter did, apply all the warmth of the heart to this one master key, 'for us,' and then the mystery is only an infinitude of love and mercy. What before we could not understand we now begin to see, and to understand the love of God which passeth all understanding. Oh, my friends, I beseech you never think of the cross of Christ without taking those two words. It is a necessary explanation to make the picture beautiful: 'for us,' 'for us'; 'for me, for me.' And then notice still further that throughout the whole of this Epistle the comparative vagueness of the words 'for me' is interpreted definitely. So far as the language of my text is concerned there can be nothing more expressive, more outspoken, or more intelligible, 'Christ also suffered for us,' for our realm. But that is not all that Peter would have us learn. If you

want to know the nature of the work, and what the Saviour suffered on the cross for our behalf, advantage, and benefit, here is the definition in the following verse, 'Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we being dead to sins should live unto righteousness.' 'For us,' not merely as an example; 'for us,' not merely for His purity, His beautiful life and calm death; no, better than all that, though a glorious example it is. He has taken away our sins, we are sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ; 'for us' in the sense of the words in another part of the Epistle, 'Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot,' and if so, we are living examples of what Christ our Saviour has done for the whole world.

There is another point I want to speak about in dwelling on the first part of the text. If you will read this Epistle of Peter at your leisure, you will see that while with Paul both make the cross of Christ the centre of their teaching, Paul speaks more about His death, and Peter more about His sufferings. Throughout the letters of Peter the phrase runs, and the phrase has come almost entirely into modern Christian usage from this Apostle. Paul speaks about the death, Peter speaks of the sufferings. The eye-witness of a Loving Friend, the man who had stood by His side through much of His sufferings (though he fled at last), a vivid imagination of His Master's trials, and a warm heart, led Peter to dwell not only on the one fact of the death, but also on the accompaniments of that awful death, of the mental and physical pain, and especially the temper of the Saviour. I shall not dwell on this, except to make one pass-

ing remark on it, viz., that there is a kind of preaching which prevails among the Roman Catholic Church, and is not uncommon to many of the Protestant churches, which dwells unduly on the physical fact of Christ's death and sufferings. I think, for my part, we are going to the other extreme, and a great many of us are losing a very great source of blessing to ourselves and to those whom we influence, because we don't realise and don't dwell sufficiently on the physical and mental sorrows and agony He went through with the death on the cross; and one bad effect of all this is that Christ's atonement has become to be a kind of theological jungle, and I don't know that the popular mind can have in the ordinary way any better means of the deliverance of Christ's cross from this theological maze than a little more frankness and honesty in dwelling on the sorrows and pain of our dear Lord.

Now a word about the second part. The sufferings of Christ as represented here in the text are not only for our gain but our pattern, leaving us an example that we should follow His steps. We are not concerned here about the general principles of Christian ethics, and I don't think I need dwell on them at all as being great blessings to us; and passing from that I would rather dwell on the one specific thought before us—on the beautiful life, the gracious words, the gentle deeds, the wisdom, the rectitude, the tenderness, the submission to the Father and the oblivion to Himself, which characterises the whole life of Jesus Christ, from the very first up to the agony on the cross. We have looked to Him as our gain, and as the head and beginning of our salvation, and now we have to turn from that mysterious and solemn thought and look to Him as an ideal pattern by

which our life should be moulded and shaped. 'Leaving us an example.' Just as Elijah's mantle dropped from him as he rose, so Christ in going up to the Father fluttered down on the world a pattern which He had in His sufferings. He goes away, but the pattern abides with us. 'Leaving us an example.' The word used here is translated quite correctly. The word example is a very remarkable and unusual one; it means literally a thing to be retained. You put a copyhead before a child, and tell him to copy it, and trace it over till he retains it; or, to come to modern English, you put the copyhead on the top of a page. What blots, pothooks, and angles you and I make as we are trying to write on the top of the page of life. See, there is the pattern. Lo, another man hath written above, and you are asked to make your life exactly the same, the same angles and the same corners—to make your life in all respects coincide with that. My friends, we shall all have to take our copybooks to the Master's desk some day. There will be a headline there which Christ hath written, and one which we have written, and how do you think we shall like to put the two side by side? My friends, we had better do it to-day than have to do it then. There is the pattern life; the copy is plain. I don't think I need say any more about the other metaphor contained here. The Divine Exemplar has left us the headline that we should follow His footsteps, and it is a blessed thought to know that we are to follow in His own steps. 'What, cannot I follow Thee now?' said Peter once, and you remember when the Apostle had been restored to his office, the words of the Saviour were—'Feed My lambs; feed My sheep; feed My lambs, follow thou Me.' This is also our privilege. As a guide going across a wet moor with a trav-

eller calls out, 'Step where I step, or else you will be bogged,' so we must tread in the steps of the Saviour, and then we shall come safe on the other side. Tread in His steps, aye, in the steps which are marked with bleeding feet, for 'He suffered and left us an example. I will just add one word, dear friends, to deepen the thought in its impressiveness, that the cross of Christ it to be the pattern of our lives. It stands alone, thank God, for mighty power in its relation to the salvation of the world, and it stands alone in awful terror. You and I are, at the very worst, but at the edge of the storm which broke in all its dreadful fury over His head; we love to go but a little way down the hillside, while He descended to the very bottom; we love to drink but very little of the cup which He drained the last drop of and held it up empty and reversed, showing that nothing trickled from it, and exclaimed, 'The cup which My Father hath given Me have I drunk.' But although alone in all its mighty power, and though alone in all its awful terror, it may be copied by us in two things—perfect submission to our Maker, and non-resistance and meekness with regard to man. There is only one way of carrying the cross of Christ, which God lays on us all, and that is bowing our back. If we resist, it will crush us, and if we yield we have something to endure; and there is but one thing which enables a man to patiently bear the sorrows and griefs which come to us all, and that is the simple secret, 'Father, not as I will, but Thy will be done.' Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow in His footsteps, and when we patiently do this the rod becomes a guiding staff, and the crown of thorns a crown of glory.

But my text reminds me that the sufferings of Christ

are not only our gain and our pattern, but they are also our power to imitate—the power to fight the battle for Christ. Example is not all. The world wants more than that. The reason for men's badness is not because they have not plenty of patterns of good. If a copyhead could save the world it would have been saved long ago. Patterns of good are plenty; the mischief is we don't copy them. There are footsteps in abundance, but then our legs are lame, and we cannot tread in them, and what is the use of copies if we have a broken pen, muddy ink, and soiled paper? So we want a great deal more than that. No, my friends, the world is not to be saved by example. You and I know that the weakness and the foolishness of men know a great deal better than the wisest of men ever did, so we want something more. Examples don't give the power nor the wish to get it. Is not that true about you? Don't you feel that if this is all which religion has given you it stops short? The gospel comes and says, 'If you love Christ Jesus because you know that He died for you,' then there will be something else than the copybook. That copy and pattern will be laid to your heart and transferred there. You will not have to go on trying to make a bungling imitation; you will get it photographed on your spirit, and on your character more distinctly and more clearly down to the very minutest shade of resemblance to the Master, and with simple loving trust you will go on from strength to strength glorifying God in your life. They that begin with the cross of Christ, and make the sacrifice their all in all, will advance heavenward joyously; the cross and the sacrifice will be the pattern of your pilgrimage here, and the perfectness of your characters unto the likeness of the Son. The cross is the agency of sancti-

fication as well as the means of forgiveness—saving grace to save us from the world, saving grace to help us everywhere and in everything for our salvation, and saving grace to help us to conquer our self-will, and saving grace to bind us to Him, whose abundant goodness and gratitude no man can tell. If we love Him we shall keep His commandments; if we love them we shall grow in grace, and not else. None else, my brother, my sister but the Eternal Exemplar stands there as our refuge and if you want to be filled with this all-saving grace deep down to the bottom of His tender heart, if you want to be good, and of pure mind, then you have to begin with that Saviour who died for you, and trust to the cross for your forgiveness. Then listen to Him saying, Any man who comes after Me, let him take up My cross—take it up, mark—‘and follow Me.’

HALLOWING CHRIST

‘Be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts.’—1 PETER iii. 14, 15.

THESE words are a quotation from the prophet Isaiah with some very significant variations. As originally spoken, they come from a period of the prophet’s life when he was surrounded by conspirators against him eager to destroy, and when he had been giving utterance to threatening prophecies as to the coming up of the King of Assyria, and the voice of God encouraged him and his disciples with the ringing words: ‘Fear not their fear, nor be afraid. Sanctify the Lord of Hosts Himself, and let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread, and He shall be for a sanctuary.’ Peter was i

similar circumstances. The gathering storm of persecution of the Christians as Christians seems to have been rising on his horizon, and he turns to his brethren, and commends to them the old word which long ago had been spoken to and by the prophet. But the variations are very remarkable. The Revised Version correctly reads my text thus: 'Fear not their fear, neither be troubled, but sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord.'

I. We have first to note the substitution, as a matter of course, without any need for explanation or vindication, of Jesus Christ in place of the Jehovah of the Old Testament.

There is no doubt that the reading adopted in the Revised Version is the true one, as attested by weighty evidence in the manuscripts, and in itself more probable by reason of its very difficulty. The other reading adopted in Authorised Versions is likely to have arisen from a marginal note which crept into the text, and was due to some copyist who was struck by Peter's free handling of the passage, and wished to make the quotations verbally accurate.

Now, if we think for a moment of the Jew's reverence for the letter of Scripture, and then think again of the Jew's intense monotheism and dread of putting any creature into the place of God, we shall understand how saturated with the belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ, and how convinced that it was the vital centre of all Christian teaching, this Apostle must have been when, without a word of explanation, he took his pen, and, as it were, drew it through 'Lord God' in Isaiah's words, and wrote in capitals over it, 'Christ as Lord.'

What does that mean? Some of us would, perhaps,

hesitate to say that it means that He who was all through the growing ages of brightening revelation of old, named 'Jehovah,' is now named Jesus Christ. I believe that from the beginning He whom we call, according to the teaching of the great prologue of John's Gospel, the 'Word of God,' was the Agent of all Divine revelation. But whether that be so or no, whether we have the right to say that the same Person who was revealed as 'Jehovah' is now revealed as 'Jesus Christ,' the 'Word made flesh,' or no, we distinctly fail to apprehend who and what Jesus Christ was to the writer of this epistle, and fail to sanctify Him in our hearts, unless we say: 'To Thee belongeth all that belongs to God.' That is the first great truth that comes out of these words, and I would commend it to any of you who may be hesitating about that Christian fact of the true divinity of Jesus Christ. You cannot strike it out of the New Testament, and if you try to do so you tear the book to pieces, and reduce it to rags and tatters.

Further, mark here what the Apostle means by the Christian sanctifying of Christ.

That is a strange expression. How am I to sanctify Jesus Christ? Well, it is the same word that is used in the Lord's Prayer, and perhaps its use there may throw light on Peter's meaning here. 'Hallowed be Thy name'—explains the meaning of *hallowing* Christ as Lord in our hearts. We sanctify or hallow one who is holy already, when we recognise the holiness, and honour what we recognise. So that the plain meaning of the commandments here is: set Christ in your hearts on the pedestal and pinnacle that belongs to Him, and then bow down before Him with all reverence and sub-

mission. Be sure that you give Him all that is His due, and in the love of your hearts, as well as in the thinkings of your minds, recognise Him for what He is, the Lord. Let us take care that our thoughts about Jesus Christ are full of devout awe and reverence. I venture to think that a great deal of modern and sentimental Christianity is very defective in this respect. You cannot love Jesus Christ too much, but you can love Him with too little reverence. And if you take up some of our luscious modern hymns that people are so fond of singing, I think you will find in them a twang of unwholesomeness, just because the love is not reverent enough, and the approaching confidence has not enough of devout awe in it. This generation looks at the half of Christ. When people are suffering from indigestion, they can only see half of the thing that they look at, and there are many of us that can only see a part of the whole Christ: and so, forgetting that He is judge, and forgetting that He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah, and forgetting that whilst He is manifested in the flesh our brother He is also *God* manifest in the flesh, our Creator as well as our Redeemer, and our Judge as well as our Saviour, some do not enough hallow Him in their hearts as Lord.

Peter had heard Jesus say that 'all men should honour the Son as they honoured the Father.' I beseech you, embrace the whole Christ, and see to it that you do not dethrone Him from His rightful place, or take from Him the glory that is due to His name. For your love will suffer, and become a mere sentiment, inoperative and sometimes unwholesome, unless you keep in mind Peter's injunction.

But, further, there is included in this commandment,

not only what Isaiah said, 'Let Him be your fear and your dread,' but also a reverent love and trust. For we do not hallow Christ as we ought, unless we absolutely confide in every word of His lips. Did you ever think that not to trust Jesus Christ is to blaspheme and profane that holy name by which we are called; and that to hallow Him means to say to Him, 'I believe every word that Thou speakest, and I am ready to risk my life upon Thy veracity'? Distrust is dishonouring the Master, and taking from Him the glory that is due unto His name.

Then there is another point to be noted: 'Sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord.' That is Peter's addition to Isaiah's words, and it is not a mere piece of tautology, but puts great emphasis into the exhortation. What is a man's heart, in New Testament and Old Testament language? It is the very centre-point of the personal self. And when Peter says, 'Hallow Him in your hearts,' he means that, deep down in the very midst of your personal being, as it were, there should be, fundamental to all, and interior to all, this reverential awe and absolute trust in Jesus Christ—an habitual thought, a central emotion, an all-dominant impulse. 'Out of the heart are the issues of life.' Put the healing agent into it, the fountain-head, and all the streams that pour out thence will be purified and sweetened. Deep in the heart put Christ, and life will be pure.

Now, in another part of this letter the Apostle says, 'Ye are a spiritual house.' I think some notion of the same sort is running in his mind here. He thinks of each man's heart as being a shrine in which the god is enthroned, and in which worship is rendered. And if we have Christ in our hearts, then our hearts are tem-

ples; and if we 'hallow' the Christ that dwells within us, we shall take care that there are no foul things in that sanctuary. We dishonour the indwelling Deity when into that same heart we allow to come lusts, foulnesses, meannesses, worldlinesses, passions, sins, and all the crew of reptiles and wild beasts that we sometimes admit there. If we hallow Christ in our hearts, in any true fashion, He will turn out the money-changers and overturn the tables. And if we desire to hallow Him in our hearts, we too, must by His Spirit's help, purge the temple that He may enter and abide.

And so I come to the next point, and that is the Christian courage and calmness that ensue from hallowing Christ in the heart.

The Apostle first puts his exhortation: 'Be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled,' and then he presents us an opposite injunction, obedience to which is the only means of obeying the first exhortation. If you do not sanctify Christ in your hearts, you cannot help being afraid of their terror, and troubled. If you do, then there is no fear that you will fall into that snare. That is to say, the one thing that delivers men from the fears that make cowards of us all is to have Christ lodged within our hearts. Sunshine puts out culinary fires. They who have the awe and the reverent love that knit them to Jesus Christ, and who carry Him within their hearts, have no need to be afraid of anything besides. Only he who can say, 'The Lord is the strength of my life' can go on to say, 'Of whom shall I be afraid?' There is nothing more hopeless than to address to men, ringed about with dangers, the foolish exhortations: 'Cheer up! do not be frightened,' unless you can tell them some reason for not being frightened. And the

one reason that will carry weight with it, in all circumstances, is the presence of Jesus.

‘With Christ in the vessel
I smile at the storm.’

The world comes to us and says: ‘Do not be afraid, do not be afraid; be of good courage; pluck up your heart, man.’ The Apostle comes and says: ‘Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts; and then, and only then, will you be bold.’ The boldness which fronts the certain dangers and calamities and the possible dangers and calamities of this life, without Christ, is not boldness, but foolhardiness. ‘The simple passeth on, and is punished,’ says the book of Proverbs. It is easy to whistle when going through the churchyard, and to say, ‘Who’s afraid?’ But the ghosts rise all the same, and there is only one thing that lays them, and that is—the present Christ.

In like manner the sanctifying of Jesus Christ in the heart is the secret of calmness. ‘Fear not their fear, neither be troubled.’ I wonder if Peter was thinking at all of another saying: ‘Let not your heart be troubled; neither let it be afraid.’ Perhaps he was. At any rate, his thought is parallel with our Lord’s when He said, ‘Let not your heart be troubled. Believe in God, and believe in Me.’ The two alternatives are possible; we shall have either troubled hearts, or hearts calmed by faith in Christ. The ships behind the breakwater do not pitch and toss. The little town up amongst the hills, with the high cliffs around it, lies quiet, and ‘hears not the loud winds when they call.’ And the heart that has Christ for its possession has a secret peace, whatever strife may be raging round it.

'Be not troubled; sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts.' Peter leaves out a clause of Isaiah's, though he conveys the idea without reiterating the words. But Isaiah had added a sweet promise which means much the same thing as I have now been saying, when he went on to declare that to those who sanctify the Lord God in their hearts, He shall be for a sanctuary. 'The sanctuary was an asylum where men were safe. And if we have made our hearts temples in which Christ is honoured, worshipped, and trusted, then we shall dwell in Him as in the secret place of the Most High'; and in the inner chamber of the Temple it will be quiet, whatever noises are in the camp, and there is light coming from the Shekinah, whatever darkness may lie around. If we take Christ into our hearts, and reverence and love Him there, He will take us into His heart, and we shall dwell in peace, because we dwell in Him.

CHRISTIAN ASCETICISM

'Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin. 2. That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. 3. For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: 4. Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you: 5. Who shall give account to Him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead. 6. For, for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit. 7. But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer. 8. And, above all things, have fervent charity among yourselves; for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.'—1 PETER iv. 1-8.

CHRISTIAN morality brought two new things into the world—a new type of life in sharp contrast with the sensuality rife on every side, and a new set of motives powerfully aiding in its realisation. Both these novelties are presented in this passage, which insists on a life

in which the spirit dominates the flesh, and is dominated by the will of God, and which puts forward purely Christian ideas as containing the motives for such a life. The facts of Christ's life and the prospect of Christ's return to judge the world are here urged as the reason for living a life of austere repression of 'the flesh' that we may do God's will.

I. We have, first, in verses 1 and 2, a general precept, based upon the broad view of Christ's earthly history. 'Christ hath suffered in the flesh.' That is the great fact which should shape the course of all His followers. But what does suffering in the flesh mean here? It does not refer only to the death of Jesus, but to His whole life. The phrase 'in the flesh' is reiterated in the context, and evidently is equivalent to 'during the earthly life.' Our Lord's life was, in one aspect, one continuous suffering, because He lived the higher life of the spirit. That higher life had to Him, and has to us, rich compensations; but it sets those who are true to it at necessary variance with the lower types of life common among men, and it brings many pains, all of which Jesus knew. The last draught from the cup was the bitterest, but the bitterness was diffused through all the life of the Man of Sorrows.

That life is here contemplated as the pattern for all Christ's servants. Peter says much in this letter of our Lord's sufferings as the atonement for sin, but here he looks at them rather as the realised ideal of all worthy life. We are to be 'partakers of Christ's sufferings' (v. 13), and we shall become so in proportion as His own Spirit becomes the spirit which lives in us. If Jesus were only our pattern, Christianity would be a poor affair, and a gospel of despair; for how should we reach

to the pure heights where He stood? But, since He can breathe into us a spirit which will hallow and energise our spirits, we can rise to walk beside Him on the high places of heroic endurance and of holy living. Very beautifully does Peter hint at our sore conflict, our personal defencelessness, and our all-sufficient armour, in the picturesque metaphor 'arm yourselves.' The 'mind of Christ' is given to us if we will. We can gird it on, and if we do, it will be as an impenetrable coat-of-mail, which will turn the sharpest arrows and resist the fiercest sword-cuts.

The last clause of verse 1 is a parenthesis, and, if it is for the moment omitted, the sentence runs smoothly on, especially if the Revised Version's reading is adopted. The purpose of arming us with the same mind is that, whilst we live on earth, we should live according to the will of God, and should renounce 'the lusts of men,' which are in us as in all men, and which men who are not clad in the armour which Christ gives to us yield to.

But what of the parenthetical statement? Clearly, the words which follow it forbid its being taken to mean that dead men do not sin. Rather the Apostle's thought seems to be that such suffering in daily life after Christ's pattern, and by His help, is at once a sign that the sufferer has shaken off the dominion of sin, and is a means of further emancipating him from it.

But the two great thoughts in this paragraph are, that the Christian life is one in which God's will, and not man's desires, is the regulating force, and that the pattern of that life and the power to copy the pattern are found in Christ, the sufferer for righteousness' sake.

II. More specific injunctions, entering into the details of the higher life, follow, interwoven, as in the preced-

ing verses, with a statement of the motives which make obedience to them possible to our weakness. The sins in view are those most closely connected with 'the flesh' in its literal meaning, amongst which are included 'abominable idolatries,' because gross acts of sensual immorality were inseparably intertwined with much of heathen worship. These sins of flesh were especially rampant among the luxurious Asiatic lands, to which this letter was addressed, but they flooded the whole Roman empire, as the works of poets like Martial and of moralists like Epictetus equally show. But New York or London could match the worst scenes in Rome or Ephesus, and perhaps would not be far behind the foul animalism of Sodom and Gomorrah. Lust and drunkenness are eating out the manhood of our race on both sides of the Atlantic, and, if we have 'the same mind' as the suffering Christ, we shall put on the armour for war to the knife with these in society, and for the rigid self-control of our own animal nature.

Observe the strong motives which Peter just touches without expanding. A sad irony lies in his saying that the time past may suffice. The flesh had had enough of time given to it,—had not God a right to the rest? The flesh should have had none; it had had all too much. Surely the readers had had enough of the lower life, more than enough. Were they not sick of it, 'satisfied' even to disgust? Let us look back on our wasted years, and give no more precious moments to serve the corruptible flesh. Further, the life of submission to the animal nature is characteristic of 'the Gentiles,' and in sharp contrast, therefore, to that proper to Christ's followers. That is as true to-day, in America and England, as ever it was. Indeed, as wealth has increased,

and so-called 'civilisation' has diffused material comforts, senseless luxury, gluttony, drunkenness, and still baser fleshy sins, have become more flagrantly common in society which is not distinctively and earnestly Christian; and there was never more need than there is to-day for Christians to carry aloft the flag of self-control and temperance in all things belonging to 'the flesh.'

If we have the mind of Christ, we shall get the same treatment from the world which Peter says that the primitive Christians did from the idolaters round them. We shall be wondered at, just as a heathen stared with astonishment at this strange, new sect, which would have nothing to do with feasts and garlands and wine-cups and lust disguised as worship. The spectacle, when repeated to-day, of Christians steadfastly refusing to share in that lower life which is the only life of so many, is, perhaps, less wondered at now, because it is, thank God! more familiar; but it is not less disliked and 'blasphemed.' A total abstainer from intoxicants will not get the good word of the distiller or brewer or consumer of liquor. He will be called faddist, narrow, sour-visaged, and so on and so on. 'You may know a genius because all the dunces make common cause against him,' said Swift. You may know a Christian after Christ's pattern because all the children of the flesh are in league to laugh at him and pelt him with nicknames.

Further, the thought of Christ as the judge should both silence the blasphemers and strengthen the blasphemed to endure. That judgment will vindicate the wisdom of those who sowed to the spirit and the folly of those who sowed to the flesh. The one will reap corruption; the other, life everlasting.

The difficult verse 6 cannot be adequately dealt with

here, but we may note that introductory 'for' shows that it, too, contains a motive urging to life, 'to the will of God,' and that no such motive appears in it if it is taken to mean, as by some, that the gospel is preached after death to the dead. Surely to say that 'the gospel was preached also (or, even) to them that are dead' is not to say that it was preached to them when dead.

Peter's letter is of late enough date to explain his looking back to a generation now passed away, who had heard it in their lifetime. Nor does one see how the meaning of 'in the flesh,' which belongs to the phrase in the frequent instances of its occurrence in this context, can be preserved in the clause 'that they might be judged according to men in the flesh,' unless that means a judgment which takes place during the earthly life.

We note, too, that the antithesis between being judged 'according to men in the flesh,' and living 'according to God in the spirit' recalls that in verse 2 between living in the flesh to the lusts of men and to the will of God. It would appear, therefore, that the Apostle's meaning is that the very aim of the preaching of the gospel to those who are gone to meet the Judge was that they might by it be judged while here in the flesh, in regard to the lower life 'according to men' (or, as verse 2 has it, 'to the lusts of men'), and, being so judged, and sin condemned in their flesh, might live according to God in their spirits. That is but to say in other words that the gospel is meant to search hearts, and bring to light and condemn the lusts of the flesh, and to impart the new life which is moulded after the will of God.

III. The reference to Christ as the judge suggests a final motive for a life of suppression of the lower nature,

--the near approach of the end of all things. The distinct statement by our Lord in Acts i. 7 excludes the knowledge of the time of the end from the revelation granted to the Apostles, so that there need be no hesitation in upholding their authority, and yet admitting their liability to mistake on that point. But the force of the motive is independent of the proximity of the judgment. Its certainty and the indefiniteness of the time when we each shall have to pass into the other state of being are sufficient to preserve for each of us the whole pressure of the solemn thought that for us the end is at hand, and to enforce thereby Peter's exhortation, 'Be ye therefore of sound mind.'

The prospect of that end will sweep away many illusions as to the worth of the enjoyments of sense, and be a bridle on many vagrant desires. Self-control in all regions of our nature is implied in the word. Our various faculties are meant to be governed by a sovereign will, which is itself governed by the Divine will; and, if we see plain before us the dawning of 'the day of the Lord,' the vision will help to tame the subordinate parts of ourselves, and to establish the supremacy of the spirit over the flesh. One special form of that general self-control is that already enjoined,—the suppression of the animal appetites, especially the abstinence from intoxicants. That form of self-control is especially meant by the second of these exhortations, 'Be sober.' How could a man lift the wine cup to his lips, and drown his higher nature in a flood of drunken riot, if the end, with its solemnities of judgment, blazed before his inner eye? But this self-command is inculcated that we may be fit to pray. These lower appetites will take all desire for prayer and all earnestness in it out of us, and only when

we keep the wings of appetites close clipped will the pinions grow by which we can mount up with wings as eagles. A praying drunkard is an impossible monster.

But exhortations to self-control are not all. We have to think of others, as well as of our own growth in purity and spirituality. Therefore Peter casts one swift glance to the wider circle of the brethren, which encompasses each of us, and gives the all-embracing direction, which carries in itself everything. 'Fervent love' to our fellow-Christians is the counterpoise to earnest government of ourselves. There is a selfishness possible even in cultivating our religion, as many a monk and recluse has shown. Such love as Peter here enjoins will save us from the possible evils of self-regard, and it will 'cover the multitude of sins,'—by which is not meant that, having it, we shall be excused if we in other respects sin, but that, having it, we shall be more desirous of veiling than of exposing our brother's faults, and shall be ready to forgive even when our brother offends against us often. Perhaps Peter was remembering the lesson which he had once had when he was told that 'seventy times seven' was not too great a multitude of sins against brotherly love to be forgiven by it in one day.

THE SLAVE'S GIRDLE

'... Be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.'—1 PETER v. 5.

THE Apostle uses here an expression of a remarkable kind, and which never occurs again in Scripture. The word rendered in the Authorised Version 'be clothed,' or better in the Revised Version, 'gird yourselves with,' really

implies a little more than either of those renderings suggests. It describes a kind of garment as well as the act of putting it on, and the sort of garment which it describes was a remarkable one. It was a part of a slave's uniform. Some scholars think that it was a kind of white apron, or overall, or something of that sort; others think that it was simply a scarf or girdle; but, at all events, it was a distinguishing mark of a slave, and he put it on when he meant work. And, says Peter, 'Do you strap round you the slave's apron, and do it for the same reason that He did it, to serve.'

So, then, there are three points in my text, and the first is what we have to wear; second, what we have to wear it for; and, third, why we should wear it.

I. What we have to wear.

'Gird yourselves with the slave's apron of humility.' Humility does not consist in being, or pretending to be, blind to one's strong points. There is no humility in a man denying that he can do certain things if he can do them, or even refusing to believe he can do them well, if God has given him special faculties in any given direction. That is not humility at all. But to know whence all my strength comes, and to know what a little thing it is, after all; not to estimate myself highly, and, still further, not to be always insisting upon other people estimating me highly, and to think a great deal more about their claims on me than fretfully to insist upon my due modicum of respect and attention from others, that is the sort of temper that Peter means here.

Now, that temper which may recognise fully any gift that God has given me, its sweep and degree, but that nevertheless takes a true, because a lowly, measure of myself, and does not always demand from other people

their regard and assistance, that temper is a thing that we can cultivate. We can increase it, and we are all bound to try specifically and directly to do so. Now, I believe that a great part of the feeble and unprogressive character of so many Christian people amongst us is due to this, that they do not definitely steady their thoughts and focus them on the purpose of finding out the weak points to which special attention and discipline should be directed. It is a very easy thing to say, 'Oh, I am a poor, weak, sinful creature!' It would do you a great deal more good to say, 'I am a very passionate one, and my business is to control that quick temper of mine,' or, 'I am a great deal too much disposed to run after worldly advantage, and my business is to subdue that,' or, 'I am afraid I am rather too close-fisted, and I ought to crucify myself into liberality.' It would be a great deal better, I say, to apply the general confession to specific cases, and to set ourselves to cultivate individual types of goodness, as well as to seek to be filled with the all-comprehensive root of it all, which lies in union with Jesus Christ. We have often to preach, dear brethren, that the way of self-improvement is not by hammering at ourselves, but by letting God mould us, and to keep the balance right. We have also to insist upon the other side of the truth, and to press the complementary thought that specific efforts after the cultivation of specific virtues—and all the more if they are virtues that are not natural to us, for the gospel is given to us to mend our natural tempers—is the duty of all Christian people that would seek to live as Christ would have them.

And how is this to be done? How am I to gird upon myself and to keep—if I may transpose the metaphor into the key of modern English—tightly buckled around

me this belt which may hold in place a number of fine articles of clothing?

Well, there are three things, I think, that we may profitably do. Go down deep enough into yourself if you want to cure a lofty estimate of yourself. The top storeys may be beautifully furnished, but there are some ugly things and rubbish down in the cellar. There is not one of us but, if we honestly let the dredge down into the depths, as far down as the *Challenger's* went, miles and miles down, will bring up a pretty collection of wriggling monstrosities that never have been in the daylight before, and are ugly enough to be always shrouded in their native darkness. Down in us all, if we will go deep enough, and take with us a light bright enough, we shall discover enough to make anything but humility ridiculous, if it were not wicked. And the only right place and attitude for a man who knows himself down to the roots of his being is the publican's when 'he stood afar off, and would not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven, and said, God be merciful to me a sinner.' Ah, dear friends, it will put an end to any undue exaltation of ourselves if we know ourselves as we are.

Further, let us try to cultivate this temper, by looking at God, and having communion with Him. Think of Him as the Giver of anything in us that is good, and that annihilates our pride. Think of Jesus as our pattern; how that kills our satisfaction in little excellences! If you get high enough up the mountainside, the undulating country which when you were down amongst the knolls showed all variations of level, and where he who lived on the top of one little mound thought himself in a fine, airy situation as compared with his neighbour down in the close valley, is smoothed down, and brought to

one uniform level; and from the hilltop the rolling land is a plateau.

I have heard of a child who, when she was told that the sun was ninety-five millions of miles off, asked if that was from the top or the bottom storey of the house! There is about as much difference between the great men and the little, between heroes and the unknown men, as measured against the distance to God, as there is difference in the distance to the sun from the slates and from the cellar. Let us live near God, and so aspiration will come in the place of satisfaction, and the unattained will gleam before us, and beckon us not in vain, and the man that sees what an infinite stretch there is before him will be delivered from the temptations of self-conceit, and will say, 'Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfected, but I follow after.'

But there is another advice to be given—cultivate the habit of thinking about other people, their excellences, their claims on you. To be always trying to get a footing in a social grade above our own is a poor effort, but there is a sense in which it is good advice—live with your *better*s. We can all do that. A man writes a bit of a book, preaches a sermon, makes a speech—all the newspapers pat him on the back, and say what a clever fellow he is. But let him steep his mind and his heart in the great works of the *great* men, and he finds out what a poor little dwarf he is by the side of them. And so all round the circle. Live with bigger men, not with little ones. And learn to discount—and you may take a very liberal discount off—either the praises or the censures of the people round you. Let us rather say, 'With me it is a very small matter to be judged of man's judgment. He that judgeth me is the Lord.'

There are plenty of hands, foremost among them a black one that is not so much a hand as a claw, ready to snatch the girdle of humility off you! Buckle it tight about you, brother; and in an immovable temper of lowly estimate of yourself live and work.

II. The second thought here is, What we are to wear the apron or girdle for?

The Revised Version makes a little alteration in the reading as well as in the translation of our text, the previous words to which, in the Authorised Version stand, 'Yea, all of you be subject one to another.' There is another reading which strikes out that clause, and adds a portion of it to the first part of my text, which then runs thus: 'Yea, all of you gird yourselves with humility to serve one another.' That is what Christian humility is for. The slave put on his garment, whatever it was, when he had work to do.

But perhaps there is a deeper thought here. I wonder if it is fanciful to see in the text one of the very numerous allusions in this epistle to the events in our Lord's Passion. You remember that Jesus laid aside His garments, and took a towel, and girded Himself, and washed the disciples' feet, and then said, 'The servant is not above His master. I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.' Probably, I think, there floated before the memory of the man who had said, 'Lord, Thou shalt never wash my feet,' and then, with the swift recoil to the opposite pole which makes us love Him so much, hurried to say, 'Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head'—some reminiscence of that upper chamber, and of how the Master had girded Himself with the slave's apron, or towel, in order that He might serve the disciples; and then had told

them that that was the pattern for all Christian men, and for all Christian living till the very end.

Service coming from humility, and humility manifested in service, are the requirements laid down in the text. Humility is the preparation for service; and service is the test of humility. If a man does not feel himself to be needy and low, he will never be able, and he will never be willing, to help those that are. You must go down if you would lift up. Laces and velvets and the fine feathers that the peacocks of self-conceit in this world strut about in are terribly in the way of Christian work. Rough work needs rough dress; and the only garb in which we shall be able to do the deeds of self-sacrifice that are needed in order to help our brethren is humility, the preparation for all service.

But, further, service is the test of humility. Plenty of people will say, 'I know that I have nothing to boast of, and so forth; but they never do any work. And there is a still more spurious kind of humility, that of a great many professing Christians (I wonder of how many of us) who, when we ask them for any kind of Christian service, say, 'I do not feel myself at all competent. I am sure I could not take a class in the Sunday School. I do not feel sufficiently master of the subject. I cannot talk. I have no facilities for influencing other people,' and so on. Too many of us are very humble when there is anything to be done, and never at any other time as far as anybody can see; and that sort of humility the Apostle does not commend. It is unfortunately very frequent amongst professing Christians. Christian humility is not particular about the sort of work it does for Jesus. Never mind whether you are on the quarter-deck, with gold lace on your coat and epaulettes on your shoulders as

an officer, or whether you are a cabin-boy doing the humblest duties, or a stoker working away down fifty feet below daylight. As long as the work is done for the great Admiral, that is enough; and whoever does any work for Him will never want for a reward. There are some of us who like to be officers, but do not like carrying a musket in the ranks. Humility is the preparation for service, and service is the test of humility.

III. Lastly, why we should wear this girdle.

There is one reason given in my text, which Peter quotes from the Old Testament. 'God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.' That is often true even in regard to outward life. Providence and man often seem to be in league together to lift up the lowly ones and thwart the proud. If a man walks with his head very high, in this low-roofed world, he is pretty sure to get it knocked against the rafters before he has done. But it is the spiritual region that the Apostle is thinking about, in which the one condition of receiving God's grace is a lowly sense of my own character and nature, which is conscious of sin and weakness, and waits before Him. And the one condition of not receiving any of that grace is to keep a stiff upper lip and a high head. If I think that I am rich, 'and increased with goods, and have need of nothing,' that 'nothing' is exactly what I shall get from God, and if I have need of everything, and know that I have, that 'everything' is what I shall get from Him. 'He resisteth the proud, and He giveth grace to the humble.' On the high barren mountain-tops the dew and the rain slide off and find their way down to the lowly valleys, where they run as fertilising rivers. And the man that is humble and of a contrite heart, 'with that man will I dwell, saith the

Lord.' If we gird ourselves with the slave's dress of humility, then we shall one day have to say, 'My soul shall rejoice in the Lord, for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation; and He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness; as a bridegroom decketh himself with his ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.'

SYLVANUS

'By Sylvanus, our faithful brother, as I account him, I have written unto you briefly.'
—1 PETER v. 12 (R. V.).

I ADOPT the Revised Version because, in one or two small points, it brings out more clearly the Apostle's meaning. This Sylvanus is, beyond all reasonable doubt, the same man who is known to us in the Acts of the Apostles by the name of Silas. A double name was very common amongst Jews, whose avocations brought them into close connection with Gentiles. You will find other instances of it amongst the Apostles: in *Paul* himself, whose Hebrew name was *Saul*; *Simon* and *Peter*; and probably in *Bartholomew* and *Nathanael*. And there is no reasonable doubt that a careful examination of the various places in which Silas and Sylvanus are mentioned shows that they were borne by one person.

Now let me put together the little that we know about this man, because it will help us to some lessons. He was one of the chief men in the church at Jerusalem when the dispute arose about the necessity for circumcision for the Gentile Christians. He was despatched to Antioch with the message of peace and good feeling which the church at Jerusalem wisely sent forth to heal

the strife. He remained in Antioch, although his co-deputy went back to Jerusalem; and the attraction of Paul—the great mass of that star—drew this lesser light into becoming a satellite, moving round the greater orb. So, when the unfortunate quarrel broke out between Paul and Barnabas, and the latter went sulkily away by himself with his dear John Mark, without his brethren's blessing, Paul chose Silas and set out upon his first missionary tour. He was Paul's companion in the prison and stripes at Philippi, and in the troubles at Thessalonica; and, though they were parted for a little while, he rejoined the Apostle in the city of Corinth. From thence Paul wrote the two letters to the Thessalonians, both of which are sent in the name of himself and Silas or Sylvanus. There is one more reference to Sylvanus in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, which mentions him as having been associated with Paul in the evangelisation of the church there.

Then he drops out of the book altogether, and we never hear anything more about him, except this one passing reference, which shows us to him in an altogether new relation. He is no longer attached to Paul, but to Peter. Paul was probably either in prison, or, possibly, martyred. At all events, Sylvanus now stood to Peter in a relationship similar to that in which he formerly stood to Paul. He was evidently acquainted with and known to the churches to whom this letter was addressed, and, therefore, is chosen to carry Peter's message to them.

Now I would suggest, in passing, how Sylvanus' relations to the two Apostles throws light upon the perfectly cordial alliance between them, and how it shatters into fragments the theory which was thought to be such a

wonderful discovery some years ago, as to the 'great schism' in the early church between one section, led by Peter, and the more liberal party, headed by Paul. Instead of that, we find the two men working together, and the only division between them was not as to the sort of gospel they preached, but as to the people to whom they preached. This little incident helps us to realise how natural it was for a man steeped in Paul's teaching to attach himself, if circumstances suggested it, to the person who has been said to have been antagonistic in the whole drift of his conceptions of Christianity to that Apostle.

But I do not wish to speak about that now. I take this figure of a man who so contentedly and continually took such a subordinate place—played second fiddle quite willingly all his days, and who toiled on without any notice or record, and ask whether it does not teach one or two things.

I. First, then, I think we may see here a hint as to the worth and importance of subordinate work.

Not a syllable that Silas ever said is recorded in Scripture. He had been a chief man among the brethren when he was in Jerusalem, but, like some other chief men in little spheres, he came to be anything but a chief man when he got alongside of Paul, and found his proper work. He did not say: 'I have always pulled the stroke oar, and I am not going to be second. I do not intend to be absorbed in this man's brilliant lustre. I would rather have a smaller sphere where my light may not suffer by comparison than be overshadowed by him.' By no means! He could not do Paul's work, but he could endure stripes along with him in the prison at Philippi, and he took them. He could not write as Peter could;

it was not his work to do that. But he could carry one of Peter's letters. And so, 'by Sylvanus, a faithful brother, I have written to you.' Perhaps Sylvanus was amanuensis as well as letter-carrier, for I daresay Peter was no great hand with a pen; he was better accustomed to haul nets. At all events, subordinate work was what God had set him to do, and so he found joy in it.

Well, then, is not that a pattern for us? People in the world or in the Church who can do prominent work are counted by units; and those who can do valuable subordinate work are counted by thousands—by millions. 'Those members which seem to be more feeble are the more necessary,' says Paul. It is a great truth, which it would do us all good to lay more to heart.

It is hard to tell what is superior and what is subordinate work. I suppose that in a steam engine the smallest rivet is quite as essential as the huge piston, and that if the rivet drops out the piston-rod is very likely to stop rising and falling. So it is a very vulgar way of talking to speak about A.'s work being large and B.'s work being small, or to assume that we have eyes to settle which work is principal and which subordinate.

The Athenians, who deemed themselves wisest in the world, thought there were few people of less importance than the fanatical Jew who was preaching a strange story about what they knew so little of that they took Jesus and Resurrection to be the names of a pair of gods, one male and one female. But in the eyes that see truly—the eyes of God—the relative importance of Apostle and Stoic was otherwise appraised.

We cannot tell, as the book of Ecclesiastes has it, 'which shall prosper—this or that.' And if we begin to

settle which is important work, we shall be sure to make mistakes, both in our judgment about other people, and in our sense of the obligations laid upon ourselves. Let us remember that when a thing is to be done by the co-operation of a great many parts, each part is as important as the other, and each is indispensable. Although more glory may come to the soldiers who go to the front and do the fighting, the troops miles in the rear, that are quietly in camp looking after the stores and keeping open the lines of communication, are quite as essential to the success of the campaign. Their names will not get into the gazette; there will probably not be any honours at the conclusion of the war showered upon them; but, if they had not been doing their subordinate work, the men at the front would never have been able to do theirs. Therefore, the old wise law in Israel was: 'As his part is that goeth down into the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff; they shall part alike.'

And so it is good for people that have only one talent, and cannot do much, and must be contented to help somebody else that can do more, to remember this pretty little picture of Sylvanus, 'the faithful brother,' contented all his life to be a satellite of somebody; first of all helping Paul, and then helping Paul's brother Peter. Let us not be too lazy, or too proud with the pride that apes humility, to do the little that we can do because it is little.

II. Another lesson which is own sister to that first one, but which may be taken for a moment separately, is, the importance and obligation of persistently doing our task, though nobody notices it.

As I remarked, there is not one word of anything that

Sylvanus said, or of anything that he did apart from Paul or Peter, recorded. And for all the long stretch of years—we do not know how many, but a very large number—that lie between this text of mine, where we find him in conjunction with Peter, and that day at Corinth, where we left him with Paul, the Acts of the Apostles does not think it worth while to mention his name. Was he sitting with his hands in his pockets all the while, do you think, doing no Christian work? Did he say, as some good people are apt to say now, 'Well, I went to teach in Sunday School for a while, and I took an interest in this, that, or the other thing for a bit, but nobody took any notice of me; and I supposed I was not wanted, and so I came away!'

Not he. That is what a great many of us do. Though we sometimes are not honest enough to say it to ourselves, yet we do let the absence of 'recognition' (save the mark) influence us in the earnestness of our Christian work to far too great an extent. And I dare say there are good friends among us who, if they would be quite honest with themselves, would take the hint, and, if I may use such a word, the rebuke, to themselves.

Dear brethren, all the work that any of us do has to become unnoticed after a little while. It will not last. Nobody will know about you or me thirty years after we are dead. What does it matter whether they know anything about us, or say anything about us, or pat us on the back for anything that we do, or recognise our service whilst we live? Surely, if we are Christian men and women, we have a better reason for working than that. 'I will never forget any of their works.' That ought to be enough for us, ought it not? Whoever forgets, He

remembers; and if He remembers, He will not remain in our debt for anything that we have done.

So let us keep on, noticed or unnoticed; it matters very little which it is. There is a fillip, no doubt—and we should not be men and women if we did not feel it—in the recognition of what we have tried to do. And sometimes it comes to us; but the absence of it is no reason for slackening our work. And this man, so patiently and persistently ‘pegging away’ at his obscure task during all these years which have been swallowed up in oblivion, may preach a sermon to us all.

Only let us remember that he also shows us that unnoticed work is noticed, and that unrecorded services are recorded. Here are you and I, nineteen centuries after he is dead, talking about him, and his name will live and last as long as the world, because, though written in no other history, it has been recorded here. Jesus Christ’s record, the Book of Life, contains the names of ‘fellow-labourers’ whose names have dropped out of every other record; and that should be enough for us. Sylvanus did no work that Christ did not see, and no work that Christ did not remember, and no work of which he did not, eighteen hundred years since, enter into the enjoyment of the fruit, and which he enjoys up there, whilst we are thinking about him down here.

III. The last thing that I would suggest is—here is an example to us of a character which we can all earn, and which will be the best that any man can get.

A great genius, a wise philosopher, an eloquent preacher, a statesman, a warrior, poet, painter? No! ‘A faithful brother.’ He may have been a commonplace one. We do not know anything about his intellectual capacity. He may have had very narrow limitations and very few

powers, or he may have been a man of large faculty and acquirements. But these things drop out of sight; and this remains—that he was *faithful*. I suppose the eulogium is meant in both senses of the word. The one of these is the root of the other; for a man that is full of faith is a man who may be trusted, is reliable, and will be sure to fulfil all the obligations of his position, and to do all the duties that are laid upon him.

You and I, whether we are wise or not, whether we are learned or not, whether we have large faculties or not, whether we have great opportunities or very small ones, can all equally earn that name if we like. If the perfect judgment, the clear eye, of Jesus Christ beholds in us qualities which will permit Him to call us by that name, what can we want better? 'A faithful brother.' Trust in Christ; let that be the animating principle of all that we do, the controlling power that restrains and limits and stimulates and impels. And then men will know where to have us, and will be sure, and rightly sure, that we shall not shirk our obligations, nor scamp our work, nor neglect our duties. And being thus full of faith, and counted faithful by Him, we need care little what men's judgments of us may be, and need desire no better epitaph than this—a faithful brother.

AN APOSTOLIC TESTIMONY AND EXHORTATION

‘... I have written briefly, exhorting, and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand.’—1 PETER v. 12.

‘I HAVE written briefly,’ says Peter. But his letter, in comparison with the other epistles of the New Testament, is not remarkably short; in fact, is longer than many of them. He regards it as short when measured by the greatness of its theme. For all words which are devoted to witnessing to the glory of God revealed in Jesus Christ, must be narrow and insufficient as compared with that, and after every utterance the speaker must feel how inadequate his utterance has been. So in that word ‘briefly’ we get a glimpse of the Apostle’s conception of the transcendent greatness of the Gospel which he had to proclaim. This verse seems to be a summary of the contents of the Epistle. And if we observe the altered translation of the latter portion of my text which is given in the Revised Version, we shall see that the verse is itself an example of both ‘testifying’ and exhorting. For the last clause is not, as our Authorised Version renders it, ‘Wherein ye stand’—a statement of a fact, however true that may be—but a commandment, ‘In which stand fast.’ And so we have here the Apostle’s all-sufficient teaching, and this all-comprehensive exhortation. He ‘witnesses’ that this is the true grace of God, and because it is, he exhorts, ‘stand fast therein.’ Let us look at these two points.

I. Peter’s testimony.

Now there is a very beautiful, though not, to superficial readers, obvious, significance in this testimony.

'This is the true grace of God.' What is meant by '*this*'? Not merely the teaching which he has been giving in the preceding part of the letter, but that which somebody else had been giving. Now these churches in Asia Minor, to whom this letter was sent, were in all probability founded by the Apostle Paul, or by men working under his direction: and the type of doctrine preached in them was what people nowadays call Pauline. And here Peter puts his seal on the teaching that had come from his brother Apostle, and says: 'The thing that you have learned, and that I have had no part in communicating to you, *this* is the true grace of God.' If such be the primary application of the words (and I think there can be little doubt that it is), then we have an interesting evidence, all the stronger because unobtrusive, of the cordial understanding between the two great leaders of the Church in apostolic times; and the figments that have been set forth, with great learning and little common sense, about the differences that divided these great teachers of Christianity, melt away into thin air. Their division was only a division of the field of labour. 'They would that I should go unto the Gentiles, and they unto the circumcision.' All the evidence confirms what Paul says, 'Whether it were they or I, so we preach, and so' all the converts 'believed.' Thus it is not without significance and beauty that we here see dimly through the ages Peter stretching out his hands to Paul's convert, and saying, 'This—which my beloved brother Paul taught you—this is the true grace of God.'

But, apart altogether from that thought, note two things; the one, the substance of this witness-bearing; and the other, Peter's right to bear it. As to the substance of the testimony; 'grace,' which has become a

threadbare word in the minds of many people, used with very little conception of its true depth and beauty of meaning, is properly love in exercise towards inferior and sinful creatures who deserve something else. Condescending, pardoning, and active love, is its proper meaning. And, says Peter, the inmost significance of the gospel is that it is the revelation of such a love as being in God's heart.

Another meaning springs out of this. That same message is not only a revelation of love, but it is a communication of the gifts of love. And the 'true grace of God' is shorthand for all the rich abundance and variety and exuberant manifoldness and all-sufficiency of the seven-fold perfect gifts for spirit and heart which come from faith in Jesus Christ. The truths that lie here in the Gospel, the truths which glow and throb in this letter of Peter's, are the revelation and the communication to men of the rich gifts of the Divine heart, which will all flow into that soul which opens itself for the entrance of God's word. And what are these truths? The main theme of this letter is Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, that was slain. 'Ye were as sheep going astray, but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.' He dwells upon Christ's innocence, upon Christ's meekness; but most of all upon the Christ that died, 'whom, having not seen, we love, and in whom, though unseen, we, believing, receive the end of our faith'—and the end of the gospel—'even the salvation of our souls.'

Thus, dear brethren, this gospel, the gospel of the Divine Christ that died for our sins, and lives to give His Spirit to all waiting hearts; this is the true grace of God. It is very needful for us to keep in view always that lofty conception of what this gospel is, that we may

not bring it down to the level of a mere theory of religion; nor think of it as a mere publication of dry doctrines; that we may not lose sight of what is the heart of it all, but may recognise this fact, that a gospel out of which are struck, or in which are diminished, the truths of the sacrifice of Christ and His ever-living intercession for us, is not the true grace of God, and is neither a revelation of His love to inferior and sinful men, nor a communication of His gifts to our weakness. Let us remember Peter's witness. This—the full gospel of incarnation, sacrifice, resurrection, ascension, and reign in glory, and return as Judge—this, and nothing else, 'is the true grace of God.' And this gospel is not exalted to its highest place unless it is regarded as such by our waiting and recipient hearts.

Further, what right had this man to take this position and say, 'I testify that this is the true grace of God'? He was no great genius; he did not know anything about comparative religion, which is nowadays supposed to be absolutely essential to understanding any one religion. He was not a scholar or a philosopher. What business had he to bring in his personality thus, as if he were an authority, and say, '*I* testify that this is the true grace of God'?

Well there are two or three answers: one peculiar to him and others common to all Christian people. The one peculiar to him is, as I believe, that he was conscious, and rightly conscious, that Jesus Christ had bestowed upon him the power to witness, and the authority to impose his testimony upon men as a word from God. In the most inartificial and matter-of-course way Peter here lets us see the apostolic conception of apostolic authority. He had a right—not because of what he was himself,

but because of the authority which Christ had conferred on him—to say to men, ‘I do not ask you to give heed to me, Peter. I myself also am a man (as he said to Cornelius), but I call on you to accept Christ’s word, spoken through me, His commissioned messenger, when *I* testify, and through me Christ testifies, that this is the true grace of God.’

Now no one but an apostle has the right to say that; but we Christian people have a right to say something like it, and if we have not apostolic authority, we may have what is very nearly as good, and sometimes as powerful in its effect upon other people, and that is authority based on personal experience. If we have plunged deep into the secrets of God, and lived closely and faithfully in communion with Him, and for ourselves have found the grace of God, His love and the gifts of His love, coming into our lives, and ennobling, calming, elevating each of us; then we, too, have a right to go to men and say, ‘Never mind about me; never mind about whether I am wise or foolish, I do not argue, but I tell you I have tasted the manna, and it is sweet. I have drunk of the water, and it comes cool and fresh from the rock. One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see. I believed, and therefore have I spoken, and on the strength of my own tasting of it, I testify that this, which has done so much for me, is the true grace of God.’ If we testify thus, and back up our witness with lives corresponding, some who are wholly untouched by a preacher’s eloquence and controversialists’ arguments, will probably be led by our attestation to make the experiment for themselves. ‘Ye are My witnesses,’ says God. He did not say, ‘Ye are my advocates.’ He did not bid us argue for Him, but He bid us witness for Him.

II. Further, notice Peter's exhortation.

According to the right rendering the last clause is, as I have already said, 'in which stand fast.' The translation in the Authorised Version, 'in which ye stand,' gives a true thought, though not the Apostle's intention here. For, as a matter of fact, men cannot stand upright and firm unless their feet are planted on the rock of that true grace of God. If our heels are well fixed on it, then our goings will be established. It is no use talking to men about steadfastness of purpose, stability of life, erect independence, resistance to antagonistic forces, and all the rest, unless you give them something to stand upon. If you talk so to a man who has his foot upon shifting sands or slippery clay; the more he tries the deeper will he sink into the one, or slide the further upon the other. The best way to help men to stand fast is to give them something to stand upon. And the only standing ground that will never yield, nor collapse, nor, like the quicksand with the tide round it, melt away, we do not know how, from beneath our feet, is 'the grace of God.' Or, as Dr. Watts says, in one of his now old-fashioned hymns:—

'Lo! on the solid Rock I stand,
And all beside is shifting sand.'

However, that is not what the Apostle Peter meant. He says, 'See that you keep firmly your position in reference to this true grace of God.' Now I am not going to talk to you about intellectual difficulties in the way of hearty and whole-souled acceptance of the gospel revelation—difficulties which are very real and very widespread in these days, but which possibly very slightly affect us; at least I hope so.

But whilst these slay their thousands, the difficulties that affect us all in the way of keeping a firm hold on, or firm standing in (for the two metaphors coalesce) the gospel, which is the true grace of God, are those that arise from two causes working in combination. One is our own poor weak hearts, wavering wills, strong passions, unbridled desires, forgetful minds; and the other is all that army and babel of seductions and inducements, in occupations legitimate and necessary, in enjoyments which are in themselves pure and innocent, in family delights, in home engagements, in pursuits of commerce or of daily business—all that crowd of things that tempt us to forget the true grace and to wander away in a foolish and vain search after vain and foolish substitutes.

Dear brethren, it is not so much because there are many adversaries in the intellectual world as because we are such weak creatures ourselves, and the world around us is so strong against us, that we need to say to one another and to ourselves, over and over again, 'Stand ye fast therein.' You cannot keep hold of a rope even, without the act of grasping tending to relax, and there must be a conscious and repeated tightening up of the muscles, or the very cord on which we hang for safety will slip through our relaxed palms. And however we may be convinced that there are no hope and no true blessedness for us except in keeping hold of God, we need that grasp to be tightened up by daily renewed efforts, or else it will certainly become slack, and we shall lose the thing that we should hold fast. So my text exhorts us against ourselves, and against the temptations of the world, which are always present with us, and are far more operative in bringing down the temperature of the Christian Church, and of its individual

members, than any chilling that arises from intellectual doubts.

And how are we to obey the exhortation? Well, plainly, if 'this' is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, 'the true grace of God' which alone will give stability to our feet, then we 'shall not stand fast' in it unless we make conscious efforts to apprehend, and comprehend, and keep hold of it in our minds as well as in our hearts. May I say one very plain word? I am very much afraid that people do not read their Bibles very much now (or if they do read them, they do not study them), and that anything like an intelligent familiarity with the whole sweep of the great system (for it is a system) of Divine truth, evolved 'at sundry times and in divers manners' in this Word, is a very rare thing amongst even good people. They listen to sermons, with more or less attention; they read newspapers, no doubt; they read good little books, and magazines, and the like; and volumes that profess to be drawn from Scripture. These are all right and good in their place. But sure I am that a robust and firm grasp of the gospel, 'which is the grace of God,' is not possible with a starvation diet of Scripture. And so I would say, try to get hold of the depth and width of meaning in the Word.

Again, try to keep heart and mind in contact with it amidst distractions and daily duties. Try to bring the principles of the New Testament consciously to bear on the small details of everyday life. Do you look at your day's work through these spectacles? Does it ever occur to you, as you are going about your business, or your profession, or your domestic work, to ask yourselves what bearing the gospel and its truths have upon these? If my ordinary, so-called secular, avocations are evacuated

of reference to, and government by, the Word of God, I want to know what of my life is left as the sphere in which it is to work. There is no need that religion and daily life should be kept apart as they are. There is no reason why the experience of to-day, in shop, and counting-house, and kitchen, and study, should not cast light upon, and make more real to me, 'the true grace of God.' Be sure that you desire, and ask for, and put yourself in the attitude of receiving, the gifts of that love, which are the graces of the Christian life. And when you have got them, apply them, 'that you may be able to withstand in the evil day; and, having done all, to stand.'

THE CHURCH IN BABYLON

'The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you . . .'
—1 PETER v. 13.

WE have drawn lessons in previous addresses from the former parts of the closing salutations of this letter. And now I turn to this one to see what it may yield us. The Revised Version omits 'the church,' and substitutes 'she'; explaining in a marginal note that there is a difference of opinion as to whether the sender of the letter is a community or an individual. All the old MSS., with one weighty exception, follow the reading 'she that is in Babylon.' But it seems so extremely unlikely that a single individual, with no special function, should be bracketed along with the communities to whom the letter was addressed, as 'elected together with' them, that the conclusion that the sender of the letter is a church, symbolically designated as a 'lady,' seems the natural one.

Then there is another question—where was Babylon?

An equal diversity of opinion has arisen about that. I do not venture to trouble you with the arguments *pro* and *con*, but only express my own opinion that 'Babylon' means Rome.

We have here the same symbolical name as in the Book of Revelation, where, whatever further meanings are attached to the designation, it is intended primarily as an appellation for the imperial city, which has taken the place filled in the Old Testament by Babylon, as the concentration of antagonism to the Kingdom of God.

If these views of the significance of the expression are adopted we have here the Church in Rome, the proud stronghold of worldly power and hostility, sending its greetings to the scattered Christian communities in the provinces of what is now called Asia Minor. The fact of such cordial communications between communities separated by so many contrarities as well as by race and distance, familiar though it is, may suggest several profitable considerations, to which I ask your attention.

I. We have here an object lesson as to the uniting power of the gospel.

Just think of the relations which, in the civil world, subsisted between Rome and its subject provinces; the latter, with bitter hatred in their hearts to everything belonging to the oppressing city, having had their freedom crushed down and their aspirations ruthlessly trampled upon; the former, with the contempt natural to metropolitans in dealing with far-off provincials. The same kind of relationship subsisted between Rome and the outlying provinces of its unwieldy empire as between England, for instance, and its Indian possessions. And the same uniting bond came in which binds the Christian converts of these Eastern lands of ours to England by a

far firmer bond than any other. There was springing up amidst all the alienation and hatred and smothered rebellion a still incipient, but increasing, and even then strong bond that held together Roman Christians and Cappadocian believers. They were both 'one in Christ Jesus.' The separating walls were high, but, according to the old saying, you cannot build walls high enough to keep out the birds; and spirits, winged by the common faith, soared above all earthly-made distinctions and met in the higher regions of Christian communion. When the tide rises it fills and unifies the scattered pools on the beach. So the uniting power of Christian faith was manifest in these early days, when it bound such discordant elements together, and made 'the church that was in Babylon' forget that they were to a large extent Romans by birth, and stretch out their hands, with their hearts in them, to the churches to whom this letter was sent.

Now, brethren, our temptation is not so much to let barriers of race and language and distance weaken our sense of Christian community, as it is to let even smaller things than these do the same tragical office for us. And we, as Christian people, are bound to try and look over the fences of our 'denominations' and churches, and recognise the wider fellowship and larger company in which all these are merged. God be thanked! there are manifest tokens all round us to-day that the age of separation and division is about coming to an end. Yearnings for unity, which must not be forced into acts too soon, but which will fulfil themselves in ways not yet clear to any of us, are beginning to rise in Christian hearts. Let us see to it, dear friends, that we do our parts to cherish and to increase these, and to yield ourselves to the uniting power of the common faith.

II. We note, further, the clear recognition here of what is the strong bond uniting all Christians.

Peter would probably have been very much astonished if he had been told of the theological controversies that were to be waged round that word 'elect.' The emphasis here lies, not on 'elect,' but on 'together.' It is not the thing so much as the common possession of the thing which bulks largely before the Apostle. In effect he says, 'The reason why these Roman Christians that have never looked you Bithynians in the face do yet feel their hearts going out to you, and send you their loving messages, is because they, in common with you, have been recipients of precisely the same Divine act of grace.' We do not now need to discuss the respective parts of man and God in it, nor any of the interminable controversies that have sprung up around the word. God had, as the fact of their possession of salvation showed, chosen Romans and Asiatics together to be heirs of eternal life. By the side of these transcendent blessings which they possessed in common, how pitifully small and insignificant all the causes which kept them apart looked and were!

And so here we have a partial parallel to the present state of Christendom, in which are seen at work, on one hand, superficial separation; on the other, underlying unity. The splintered peaks may stand, or seem to stand, apart from their sister summits, or may frown at each other across impassable gorges, but they all belong to one geological formation, and in their depths their bases blend indistinguishably into a continuous whole. Their tops are miles apart, but beneath the surface they are one. And so the things that bind Christian men together are the great things and the deepest things;

and the things that part them are the small and superficial ones. Therefore it is our wisdom—not only for the sake of the fact of our unity and for the sake of our consciousness of unity, but because the truths which unite are the most important ones—that they shall bulk largest in our hearts and minds. And if they do, we shall know our brother in every man that is like-minded with us towards them, whatever shibboleth may separate us. I spoke a moment ago about the separate pools on the beach, and the tide rising. When the tide goes down, and the spiritual life ebbs, the pools are parted again. And so ages of feeble spiritual vitality have been ages of theological controversy about secondary matters; and ages of profound realisation by the Church of the great fundamentals of gospel truth have been those when its members were drawn together, they knew not how. Hence they can say of and to each other, ‘Elect together with you.’

Brethren, for the sake of the strength of our own religious life, do not let us fix our attention on the peculiarities of our sects, but upon the catholic truths believed everywhere, always, by all. Then we shall ‘walk in a large place,’ and feel how many there are that are possessors of ‘like precious faith’ with ourselves.

III. Then, lastly, we may find here a hint as to the pressing need for such a realisation of unity.

‘The church that is in Babylon’ was in a very uncongenial place. Thank God, no Babylon is so Babylonish but that a Church of God may be found planted in it. No circumstances are so unfavourable to the creation and development of the religious life but that the religious life may grow there. An orchid will find footing upon a bit of stick, because it draws nourishment from the

atmosphere; and they who are fed by influx of the Divine Spirit may be planted anywhere, and yet flourish in the courts of our God. So 'the church that is in Babylon' gives encouragement as to the possibility of Christian faith being triumphant over adverse conditions.

But it also gives a hint as to the obligation springing from the circumstances in which Christian people are set, to cultivate the sense of belonging to a great brotherhood. Howsoever solitary and surrounded by uncongenial associations any Christian man may be, he may feel that he is not alone, not only because his Master is with him, but because there are many others whose hearts throb with the same love, whose lives are surrounded by the same difficulties. It is by no means a mere piece of selfish consolation which this same Apostle gives in another part of his letter, when he bids the troubled so be of good cheer, as remembering that the 'same afflictions were accomplished in the brotherhood which is in the world.' He did not mean to say, 'Take comfort, for other people are as badly off as you are,' but he meant to call to the remembrance of the solitary sufferer the thousands of his brethren who were 'dreeing the same weird' in the same uncongenial world.

If thus you and I, Christian men, are pressed upon on all sides by such worldly associations, the more need that we should let our hearts go out to the innumerable multitude of our fellows, companions in the tribulation, and patience, and kingdom of Jesus Christ. Precisely because the Roman believers were in Babylon, they were glad to think of their brethren in Asia. Isolated amidst Rome's splendours and sins, it was like a breath of cool air stealing into some banqueting house heavy with the fumes of wine, or some slaughter-house reeking with the

smell of blood, to remember these far-off partakers of a purer life.

But if I might for a moment diverge, I would venture to say that in the conditions of thought, and the tendencies of things in our own and other lands, it is more than ever needful that Christian people should close their ranks, and stand shoulder to shoulder. For men who believe in a supernatural revelation, in the Divine Christ, in an atoning Sacrifice, in an indwelling Spirit, are guilty of suicidal folly if they let the comparative trivialities that part them, separate God's army into isolated groups, in the face of the ordered battalions that are assaulting these great truths.

Because persecution was beginning to threaten and rumble on the horizon, like a rising thundercloud, it was the more needful, in Peter's time, that Christians parted by seas, by race, language, and customs, should draw together. And for us, fidelity to our testimony and loyalty to our Master, to say nothing of common sense and the instinct of self-preservation, command Christian men in this day to think more, and to speak more, and to make more, of the great verities which they all possess in common.

Thus, brethren, living in Babylon, we should open our windows to Jerusalem; and though we dwell here as aliens, we may say, 'We are come unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem; to an innumerable company of angels; to the spirits of just men made perfect; and to the Church of the first-born whose names are written in Heaven.'

MARCUS, MY SON

‘ . . . So doth Marcus, my son.’—1 PETER v. 13.

THE outlines of Mark's life, so far as recorded in Scripture, are familiar. He was the son of Mary, a woman of some wealth and position, as is implied by the fact that her house was large enough to accommodate the ‘many’ who were gathered together to pray for Peter's release. He was a relative, probably a cousin (Col. iv. 10, Revised Version), of Barnabas, and possibly, like him, a native of Cyprus. The designation of him by Peter as ‘my son’ naturally implies that the Apostle had been the instrument of his conversion. An old tradition tells us that he was the ‘young man’ mentioned in his Gospel who saw Christ arrested, and fled, leaving his only covering in the captor's hands. However that may be, he and his relatives were early and prominent disciples, and closely connected with Peter, as is evident from the fact that it was to Mary's house that he went after his deliverance. Mark's relationship to Barnabas made it natural that he should be chosen to accompany him and Paul on their first missionary journey, and his connection with Cyprus helps to account for his willingness to go thither, and his unwillingness to go further into less known ground. We know how he left the Apostles, when they crossed from Cyprus to the mainland, and retreated to his mother's house at Jerusalem. We have no details of the inglorious inactivity in which he spent the time until the proposal of a second journey by Paul and Barnabas. In the preparations for it, the foolish indulgence of his cousin, far less kind than Paul's wholesome sever-

ity, led to a rupture between the Apostles, and to Barnabas setting off on an evangelistic tour on his own account, which received no sympathy from the church at Antioch, and has been deemed unworthy of record in the Acts.

Then followed some twelve years or more, during which Mark seems to have remained quiescent; or, at all events, he does not appear to have had any work in connection with the great Apostle. Then we find him reappearing amongst Paul's company when he was in prison for the first time in Rome; and in the letters to Colossæ he is mentioned as being a comfort to the Apostle then. He sends salutations to the Colossians, and is named also in the nearly contemporaneous letter to Philemon. According to the reference in Colossians, he was contemplating a journey amongst the Asiatic churches, for that in Colossæ is bidden to welcome him. Then comes this mention of him in the text. The fact that Mark was beside Peter when he wrote seems to confirm the view that Babylon here is a mystical name for Rome; and that this letter falls somewhere about the same date as the letters to Colossæ and Philemon. Here again he is sending salutations to Asiatic churches. We know nothing more about him, except that some considerable time after, in Paul's last letter, he asks Timothy, who was then at Ephesus, the headquarters of the Asiatic churches, to 'take Mark,' who, therefore, was apparently also in Asia, 'and bring him' with him to Rome; 'for,' says the Apostle, beautifully referring to the man's former failure, 'he is profitable to me for'—the very office that he had formerly flung up—'the ministry.'

So, possibly, he was with Paul in his last days. And then, after that, tradition tells us that he attached him-

self more closely to the Apostle Peter; and, finally, at his direction and dictation, became the evangelist who wrote the 'Gospel according to Mark.'

Now that is his story; and from the figure of this 'Marcus, my son,' and from his appearance here in this letter, I wish to gather two or three very plain and familiar lessons.

I. The first of them is the working of Christian sympathy.

Mark was a full-blooded Jew when he began his career. 'John, whose surname was Mark,' like a great many other Jews at that time, bore a double name—one Jewish, 'John,' and one Gentile, 'Marcus.' But as time goes on we do not hear anything more about 'John,' nor even about 'John Mark,' which are the two forms of his name when he is first introduced to us in the Acts of the Apostles, but he finally appears to have cast aside his Hebrew and to have been only known by his Roman name. And that change of appellation coincides with the fact that so many of the allusions which we have to him represent him as sending messages of Christian greeting across the sea to his Gentile brethren. And it further coincides with the fact that his gospel is obviously intended for the use of Gentile Christians, and, according to an old and reliable tradition, was written in Rome for Roman Christians. All of which facts just indicate two things, that the more a man has real operative love to Jesus Christ in his heart, the more he will rise above all limitations of his interests, his sympathy, and his efforts, and the more surely will he let himself out, as far as he can, in affection towards and toils for all men.

This change of name, though it is a mere trifle, and may have been adopted as a matter of convenience, may

also be taken as reminding us of a very important truth, and that is, that if we wish to help people, the first condition is that we go down and stand on their level, and make ourselves one with them, as far as we can. And so Mark may have said, 'I have put away the name that parts me from these Gentiles, for whom I desire to work, and whom I love; and I take the name that binds me to them.' Why, it is the very same principle, in a small instance—just as a raindrop that hangs on the thorn of a rose-bush is moulded by the same laws that shape the great sphere of the central sun—it is a small instance of the great principle which brought Jesus Christ down into the world to die for us. You must become like the people that you want to help. 'Forasmuch as the children were partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same, that He might deliver them.' And so, not only the duty of widening our sympathies, but one of the supreme conditions of being of use to anybody, are set forth in the comparatively trifling incident, which we pass by without noticing it, that this man, a Jew to his finger-tips, finally found himself—or, rather, finally was carried, for it was no case of unconscious drifting—into the position of a messenger of the Cross to the Gentiles, and for the sake of efficiency in his work, and of getting close by the side of people whom he wanted to influence, flung away deliberately that which parted him from them. It is a small matter, but a little window may show a very wide prospect.

II. The history of Mark suggests the possibility of overcoming early faults.

We do not know why he refused to bear the burden of the work that he had so cheerily begun. Probably the reason that I have suggested may have had something

to do with it. When he started he did not bargain for going into unknown lands, in which there were many toils to be encountered. He was willing to go where he knew the ground, and where there were people that would make things easy for him; but when Paul went further afield, Mark's courage ebbed out at his finger ends, and he slunk back to the comfort of his mother's house in Jerusalem. At all events, whatever his reason, his return was a fault; or Paul would not have been so hard upon him as he was. The writer of the Acts puts Paul's view of the case strongly by the arrangement of clauses in the sentence in which he tells us that the Apostle 'thought not good to take him with them who withdrew from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work.' If he thus threw down his tools whenever he came to a little difficulty, and said, 'As long as it is easy work, and close to the base of operations, I am your man, but if there is any sacrifice wanted you must look out for somebody else,' he was not precisely a worker after Paul's own heart. And the best way to treat him was as the Apostle did; and to say to Barnabas' indulgent proposal, 'No! he would not do the work before, and now he shall not do it.' That is often God's way with us. It brings us to our senses, as it brought Mark to his.

We do not know how long it took to cure Mark of his early fault, but he was thoroughly cured. The man that was afraid of dangers and difficulties and hypothetical risks in Asia Minor became brave enough to stand by the Apostle when he was a prisoner, and was not ashamed of his chain. And afterwards, so much had he won his way into the Apostle's confidence, and made himself needful for him by his services and his sweetness, that the lonely

prisoner, with the gibbet or headsman's sword in prospect, feels that he would like to have Mark with him once more, and bids Timothy bring him with himself, for 'he is profitable to me for the ministry.' 'He can do a thousand things that a man like me cannot do for himself, and he does them all for love and nothing for reward.' So he wants Mark once more. And thus not only Paul's generosity, but Mark's own patient effort had pasted a clean sheet over the one that was inscribed with the black story of his desertion, and he became 'profitable for' the task that he had once in so petulant and cowardly a way, flung up.

Well, translate that from the particular into the general and it comes to this. Let no man set limits to the possibilities of his own restoration, and of his curing faults which are most deeply rooted within himself. Hope and effort should be boundless. There is nothing that a Christian man may not reach, in the way of victory over his worse self, and ejection of his most deeply-rooted faults, if only he will be true to Jesus, and use the gifts that are given to him. There are many of us whose daily life is pitched in a minor key; whose whole landscape is grey and monotonous and sunless; who feel as if yesterday must set the tune for to-day, and as if, because we have been beaten and baffled so often, it is useless to try again. But remember that the field on which the Stone of Help was erected, to commemorate the great and decisive victory that Israel won, was the very field on which the same foes had before contended, and *then* Israel had been defeated.

So, brethren, we may win victories on the very soil where formerly we were shamefully put to the rout; and our Christ with us will make anything possible for us,

in the way of restoration, of cure of old faults, of ceasing to repeat former sins. I suppose that when a spar is snapped on board a vessel, and lashed together with spun yarn and lanyards, as a sailor knows how to do, it is stronger at the point of fracture than it was before. I suppose that it is possible for a man to be most impregnable at the point where he is naturally weakest, if he chooses to use the defences that Jesus Christ has given.

III. Take another lesson—the greatness of little service.

We do not hear that this John Mark ever tried to do any work in the way of preaching the gospel. His business was a very much humbler one. He had to attend to Paul's comfort. He had to be his factotum, man of all work; looking after material things, the commissariat, the thousand and one trifles that some one had to see to if the Apostle's great work was to get done. And he did it all his life long. It was enough for him to do thoroughly the entirely 'secular' work, as some people would think it, which it was in his power to do. That needed some self-suppression. It would have been so natural for Mark to have said, 'Paul sends Timothy to be bishop in Crete; and Titus to look after other churches; Epaphroditus is an official here; and Apollos is a great preacher there. And here am I, grinding away at the secularities yet. I think I'll "strike," and try and get more conspicuous work.' Or he might perhaps deceive himself, and say, 'more directly religious work,' like a great many of us that often mask a very carnal desire for prominence under a very saintly guise of desire to do spiritual service. Let us take care of that. This 'minister,' who was not a minister at all, in our sense of the word, but only in the sense of being a servant, a private attendant

and valet of the Apostle, was glad to do that work all his days.

That was self-suppression. But it was something more. It was a plain recognition of what we all ought to have very clearly before us, and that is, that all sorts of work which contribute to one end are one sort of work; and that at bottom the man who carried Paul's books and parchments, and saw that he was not left without clothes, though he was so negligent of cloaks and other necessities, was just as much helping on the cause of Christ as the Apostle when he preached.

I wonder if any of you remember the old story about an organist and his blower. The blower was asked who it was that played that great sonata of Beethoven's, or somebody's. And he answered, 'I do not know who played, but I blew it.' There is a great truth there. If it had not been for the unknown man at the bellows, the artist at the keys would not have done much. So Mark helped Paul. And as Jesus Christ said, 'He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet, shall receive a prophet's reward.'

IV. Take as the last lesson the enlarged sphere that follows faithfulness in small matters.

What a singular change! The man who began with being a servant of Paul and of Barnabas ends by being the evangelist, and it is to him, under Peter's direction, that we owe what is possibly the oldest, and, at all events, in some aspects, an entirely unique, narrative of our Lord's life. Do you think that Peter would ever have said to him: 'Mark! come here and sit down and write what I tell you,' if there had not been beforehand these long years of faithful service? So is it always, dear friends. 'He that is faithful in that which is least

is faithful also in much.' That is not only a declaration that faithfulness is one in kind, whatever be the diameter of the circle in which it is exercised, but it may also be taken as a promise, though that was not the original intention of the saying.

For quite certainly, in God's providence, the tools do come to the hand that can wield them, and the best reward that we can get for doing well our little work is to have larger work to do. The little tapers are tempted, if I may use so incongruous a figure, to wish themselves set up on loftier stands. Shine your brightest in your corner, and you will be 'exalted' in due time. It is so, as a rule, in this world; sometimes too much so, for, as they say is the case at the English bar, so it is sometimes in God's Church, 'There is no medium between having nothing to do and being killed with work.' Still the reward for work is more work. And the law will be exemplified most blessedly when Christ shall say, 'Well done! good and faithful servant. Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things.'

So this far-away figure of the minister-evangelist salutes us too, and bids us be of good cheer, notwithstanding all faults and failures, because it is possible for us, as he has proved, to recover ourselves after them all. God will not be less generous in forgiveness than Paul was; and even you and I may hear from Christ's lips, 'Thou art profitable to Me for the ministry.'

II. PETER

LIKE PRECIOUS FAITH

'... Them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.'—2 PETER i. 1.

PETER seems to have had a liking for that word 'precious.' It is not a very descriptive one; it does not give much light as to the quality of the things to which it is applied; but it is a suggestion of one-idea value. It is interesting to notice the objects to which, in his two letters—for I take this to be his letter—he applies it. He speaks of the trial of faith as being 'precious.' He speaks (with a slight modification of the word employed) of Jesus Christ as being 'to them that believe, precious.' He speaks of the 'precious' blood of Christ. These instances are in the first epistle. In this second epistle we have the words of my text, and a moment after, 'exceeding great and precious promises.' Now look at Peter's list of valuables; 'Christ, Christ's blood, God's promises, our Faith, and the discipline to which that faith is subjected.' These are things that the old man had found out to be of worth.

But then there is another word in my text that must be noted, 'like precious.' It brings into view two classes, to one of which Peter himself belongs—'us' and 'they.' Who are these two classes? It may be that he is thinking of the immense difference between the intelligent and developed faith of himself and the other Apostles, and the rudimentary and infantile faith of the

recent believers to whom he may be speaking. And, if so, that would be beautiful, but I rather take it that he is tacitly contrasting in his own mind the difference between the Gentile converts as a whole, and the members of the Jewish community who had become believers in Jesus Christ, and that he is repeating the lesson that he had learned on the housetop at Joppa, and had had further confirmed to him by the experience of Cæsarea, and that he is really saying exactly what he said when he defended himself before the Council in Jerusalem: 'Seeing that God had given unto them the like gift that he did unto us, who was I, that I should withstand God?' And so he looks out over all the Christian community, and ignores 'the middle wall of partition,' and says, 'Them that have obtained like precious faith with us.' I wish very simply to try to draw out the thoughts that lie in these words, and cluster round that well-worn and threadbare theological expression and Christian verity of 'faith' or 'trust.'

I. And the first thing that I would desire to point you to is, what we learn here as to the object of faith.

Now those of you who are using the Revised Version will notice that there is a very slight, but important, alteration there, from the rendering in the old translation. We read in the latter: 'Like precious faith with us *through* the righteousness, . . . ' and that is a meaning that might be defended. But the Revised Version says, and says more accurately as far as the words go, and more truly as far as Christian thought goes, 'them that have obtained like precious faith with us *in* the righteousness.' Now, I daresay, it will occur to us all that that is a departure from the usual form in which faith is presented to us in the New Testament, because

there, thank God! we are clearly taught that the one thing which faith grapples is not a thing but a Person. Christian faith is only human trust turned in a definite direction. Just as our trust lays hold on one another, so the object of faith is, in the deepest analysis, no doctrine, no proposition, not even a Divine fact, not even a Divine promise, but the Doer of the fact, and the Promiser of the promise, and the Person, Jesus Christ. When you say, 'I trust so-and-so's word!' what you mean is, 'I trust *him*, and so I put credence in his word.' And Christianity would have been delivered from mountains of misconception, and many a poor soul would have felt that a blaze of light had come in upon it, if this had been clearly proclaimed, and firmly apprehended by preachers and by hearers, that the object of trust is the living Person, Jesus Christ, and that the trust which grapples us to Him is essentially a personal relation entered into by our wills and hearts far more than by our heads.

All that is being apprehended by the Christian Church to-day a great deal more clearly than it used to be when some of us were young. But we have the defects of our qualities. And this generation is accustomed far too lightly and superficially to say 'Oh! I do not care about doctrines. I cleave to the living Christ!' Amen say I. But there is another question—What Christ is it that you are cleaving to? For our only way of knowing a person with whom we have no external acquaintance is by what we are told about him, and believe about him. And so, while we cannot assert too strongly that faith or trust in the living Christ, and not in a dogma is the basis of real Christian life, we have need to be very definite and sure as to what Christ—which Chris

—it is that we are trusting to? And there my text comes in, and tells us that faith is to grasp Christ as our righteousness; and another saying of the Apostle Paul's comes in, who for once speaks of faith as being faith not only in the Christ, but in 'His blood':—

'Jesus! Thy blood and righteousness,
My beauty are, my glorious dress.'

Brethren! you will not get beyond that. The Christ, trusting in whom we have life and salvation, is the Christ whose blood cleanses, Whose righteousness clothes us poor, sinful men. So, while proclaiming with all emphasis, and rejoicing to press it upon all my brethren, that salvation comes by personal trust in the Person, I supplement and fill out, not contradict, that proclamation, when I further say that the Person by trusting in whom we are saved, is the Jesus whose blood cleanses and whose righteousness becomes ours. That righteousness is, in our text, contemplated as God's, as being embodied in Christ's, that from Him it may be imparted to us, if we will fulfil the condition on which alone it can be ours, viz., faith. It becomes ours, by no mere imputation which has not a reality at the back of it, but because faith brings us into such a vital union with Jesus Christ as that His righteousness, or at least a spark from the central flame, becomes ours, not only in reference to our exemption from the burden of our guilt, but in reference to our becoming conformed to the image of His dear Son, and created anew in righteousness and holiness. The object of faith is Christ, the Christ whose blood and righteousness cleanses and clothes sinful souls.

II. Let me ask you to look, in the next place, to what

this text suggests to us about the worth of Christian faith.

Peter calls it precious. Consider its worth as a channel. There is a very remarkable expression used in the Acts of the Apostles, 'The door of faith.' A door is of little value in itself, worth a few shillings at the most, but if it opens the way into a palace then it is worth something. And all the preciousness that there is in faith comes, not from its intrinsic value, but from the really precious things which it gives into our hands. Just as the dyer's hand may be tinged with royal purple, if he has been working in it, or a woman's hand may be scented and made fragrant if she has been handling perfumes, so the hand of faith takes tint and fragrance from that with which it is conversant. It is precious because it is the channel by which all precious things flow into our hearts and lives. If Ladysmith is, as I suppose it is, dependent for its water supply on one lead pipe, the preciousness of that pipe is not measured by what it would fetch if it were put up to auction for its lead, but by that which flows through it, and without which Death would come. And my faith is the pipe by which all the water of life comes sparkling and rejoicing into my thirsty soul. It is the opening of the door 'that the King of Glory may come in'; it is the taking down of the shutters that the sunshine may blaze into the darkened chamber; it is the grasping of the electric wire that the circuit may be completed. God puts out His hand, and we lay hold of it. It is not the outstretched hand from earth, but the down-stretched hand from heaven that makes the tottering man stand. So, dear friends, let us understand that salvation does not come as the reward of faith, but that the salvation is

in the faith, because faith is the channel by which all God's salvation pours into us. So there is nothing arbitrary in the way of salvation, as some shallow thinkers seem to propose, and there is no reason in the question, 'Why does God make salvation depend upon faith?' God could not but make salvation depend upon faith, because there is no other possible way by which the blessings which are gathered together into that one great pregnant word 'salvation' could find their way into a man's heart but through the channel of his trust. Have you opened that channel? If you have not, you need not wonder it cannot be otherwise—that salvation does not come unto you.

Consider its worth as a defence. The Apostle in one place speaks about 'the shield of faith.' But there is nothing in the belief that I am safe to make me safe. It is very often a fatal blunder. All depends upon that or Him, to which or whom I am trusting for my safety. Put yourself beneath the true Shield—'The Lord God is a sun and shield'—and then you will be safe. Your way of running into the strong tower which alone, with its massive walls, protects us from all danger and from all sin, is by trusting Him.

Just as light things on a ship's deck have to be lashed in order to be secured and lie still, you and I have to lash ourselves to Jesus Christ; then, not by reason of the lashings, but by reason of Him, we are fastened and secured.

Consider the worth of faith as a means of purifying. This very Apostle, in his great speech in Jerusalem, when vindicating the reception of the Gentiles into the Church, spoke of God as having 'purified their hearts by faith.' And here again, I say, there is no cleansing

power in the act of trust. Cleansing power is in that which, by the act of trust, comes into my heart. Faith is not simple receptivity, not mere passive absorbing of what is given, but it is the active taking by desire as well as by confidence. And when we trust in Jesus Christ, His blood and righteousness, there flows into our hearts that Divine life which, like a river turned into a dung-heap, will sweep all the filth before it. You have to get the purifying power by faith. Ay! and you have to utilise the purifying power by effort and by work. 'What God hath joined together, let not men put asunder.'

III. Now, lastly, note the identity of faith.

'*Like precious,*' says Peter, and, as I said, there may be defended a double application of the word, and two sets of pairs of classes may be supposed to have been in his mind. I do not discuss which of these may be the case, only I would suggest to you that from this beautiful gathering together of all the diversities of the Christian character, conception, and development into one great whole, we are taught that the one thing that makes a Christian is this trust. That is the universal characteristic; that is uniform, whatever may differ. Ah! how much and how little it takes to make a Christian. 'Only faith?' you say. Yes, thank God! not this, or that, no rites, not anything that a priest can do to you. No orthodoxy; not morality; these will come, but trust in Christ and His blood and righteousness. England is a Christian country; is it? This is a Christian congregation; is it? You are a Christian; are you? Are you trusting in that Christ? If you are not; no! though you be orthodox up to the eyebrows, and though seven or seven hundred sacraments may have been given to you

and though you be a clean living man—all that does not make a Christian, but *this* does—'Like precious faith with us in the righteousness of God and our Saviour.'

Again, this great thought of the identity or uniformity of the one characteristic may suggest to us how Christian faith is one, under all varieties of form. There never has been in the Christian Church again, notwithstanding all our deplorable divisions and schisms, such a tremendous cleft as there was in the primitive Church between the Jewish and Gentile components thereof. But Peter flings this flying bridge across that abyss, and knits the two sides together, because he knows that away out yonder, amongst the Gentiles, and here in the little circle of the Jewish believers, there was the one faith that unifies all.

So, dear friends, there should be the widest charity, but no vagueness; for the Christian faith in Him which unifies and bridges over all differences, mental and theological, is the Christ by whose blood we are cleansed, with whose righteousness we are made righteous.

Again, from the same thought flows the other, of the identity of the uniform characteristic, at all stages of development or maturity. The mustard-seed and the tree, 'which is greater than all herbs,' have the same life in them. And the feeblest, tremulous little spark in some heart, just kindled, and scarcely capable of sustaining itself, is one with the flame leaping heaven-high, which lights up and cleanses the whole soul. So for those in advance, humility, and for those in the rear, hope. And something more than hope, for if you have the feeblest beginning of tremulous trust, you have that which only needs to be fostered to make you like Jesus Christ. Look at what follows our text: 'Add to your faith, virtue,

and to virtue, knowledge,' and so on, through the whole linked series of Christian graces. They all come out of that trust which knits us to Him who is the source of them all. So you and I are responsible for bringing our faith to the highest development of which it is capable.

Alas! alas! are we not all like this very Apostle, who in an ecstasy of trust and longing, ventured himself on the wave, and as soon as he felt the cold water creeping above his knees lost his trust, and so lost his buoyancy and was ready to go down like a stone? He had a little faith, that he was beginning to sink; he had so much that he put out his hand—a desperate hand it was—and cried, 'Lord, save me!' And the hand came, and that steadied him, and bore him up till the water was beneath the soles of his feet again. 'Lord! I believe help Thou my unbelief!'

MAN SUMMONED BY GOD'S GLORY AND ENERGY

'... His Divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue.'
2 PETER i. 3.

'I KNEW thee,' said the idle servant in our Lord's parable, 'that thou wert an austere man, reaping where thou didst not sow, and gathering where thou hadst not strewed. I was afraid, and went and hid my talent in the earth.' Our Lord would teach us all with that pregnant word the great truth that if once a man gets it into his head that God's principal relation to him is to demand, and to command, you will get no work out of that man; that such a notion will paralyse all activity and cut the nerve of all service. And the converse is

as true, namely, that the one thought about God, which is fruitful of all blessing, joy, spontaneous, glad activity, is the thought of Him as giving, and not of demanding, of bestowing, and not of commanding. Teach a man that he is, as the book of James has it, 'the giving God,' and let that thought soak into the man's heart and mind, and you will get any work out of him. And only when that thought is deep in the spirit will there be true service.

Now that is the connection in which the words of my text come; for they are laid as the broad foundation of the great commandment that follows: 'Beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to your virtue knowledge,' and so on, all the round of the ladder by which the Apostle represents us as climbing up to God. The foundation of this injunction is—God has given you everything. You have got it to begin with, and so do you set yourselves to work, and see that you make the thing that is yours your own, and incorporate into your being and into the very substance of your soul, and work out in all the blessed activities of a Christian life, the gifts that His royal and kingly hand has bestowed upon you. Take for granted that God loves you and gives you His whole self, and work on in the fulness of His possessed gift.

That is the connection of the words before us. I take them just as they lie in our passage, dealing first of all with this question—God's call to you and me; how it is done. Now I do not know if I can venture to indulge any remarks about Biblical criticism, but you will perhaps bear with me just for a moment whilst I say that the people who know a great deal more about such subjects than either you or I, agree with one consent that

the proper way of reading this verse of my text is not as our Bible has it: 'Him that has called us *to* glory and virtue,' but 'Him that hath called us *by*—by his own glory and virtue.' Do you see the difference? In one case the language expresses the things in imitation of the Divine nature to which God summons you and me when He calls us. That is how our Bible has taken it, but the deeper thought still is the things in that Divine nature and activity itself which constitute His great summons and invitation of men to His side; and these are the two, whatever they might be, which the Apostle here describes in that rather peculiar and unusual language for Scripture, 'Who has called us by His own glory and His own virtue.' I venture to dwell on these two points for a moment or two.

Now, first of all, God's glory. Threadbare and consequently vague as the expression is in the minds of great many people who have heard it with their ears ever since they were little children, God's glory has a very distinct and definite meaning in Scripture, and all starts as I think, from the Old Testament use of the expression which was the distinct specific name for the supernatural light that lay between the cherubim, and brooded over the ark on the mercy-seat. The word signifies specifically and originally the glory of God, and irradiation of a material, though supernatural, symbol of His Divine and spiritual presence. Very well, lay hold of that material picture, for God teaches us as we do our children with pictures. Take the symbol and lift it up into the spiritual region, and it is just this: the glory of God in its deepest meaning is the irradiation and the perpetual pouring out and out and out from Himself, as the rays of the sun stream out from its great orb, pouring out

from Himself the light and the perfectness and the beauty of His own self revelation. And I think we may fairly translate and paraphrase the first words of my text into this: God's great way of summoning men to Himself is by laying out His love upon them and letting the fulness of that ineffable and uncreated light, in which is no darkness at all, stream into the else blinded and hopeless lives and hearts of men. Then the other side of the Apostle's thought seems to me—if we will only strip it of the threadbare technicalities associated with it—as great and wonderful, God's glory and God's virtue. A heathenish kind of smack lingers about that word, both as applied to men and as applied to God, and so seldom found in the New Testament; but meaning here, as I venture to say, without stopping to show it—meaning here substantially the same thing that we mean by that word energy or power. You know old women in country places talk about the virtues of plants. They do not mean by this the goodness of plants, but they mean the occult powers which they suppose them able to put forth. We read in one of the gospels that our Lord Himself said at one singular period of His life that virtue had gone out of Him, meaning thereby not goodness but energy. So I think we get a sufficient equivalent to the Apostle's meaning if for the second two words of my text we read, 'He hath called us by the glory, the raying out of his love, and He hath called us by the activity and the energy, the power in action of His great and illustrious Spirit.' So you see these two things, the light that streams out of an energy which is born of the streaming light. These two things are really at bottom but one, various aspects of one idea. Modern physicists tell us that all the activity in the system comes from the sun,

and in the higher region all the activity comes from the sun, and there is no mightier force in the physical universe than the sunlight. Lightnings are vulgar, noisy, and limited in contrast. The all-conquering force is the light that streams out, and so says Peter in his vivid picturesque way—not meaning the mere talk of philosophy or theology—the manifestation of the glory of God is the mightiest force in the whole universe. It is not like the play of the moonbeam upon an iceberg, ineffectual, cold, merely touching the death without melting or warming it, but it rays out like the sun in the heavens, and the work done by the light is mightier than all our work. By His glory, and by the transcendent energies which reside in that illustrious manifestation of the uncreated light, God summons men to Himself. Well, if that is anything like fair exposition of the words before us, let me just ask you before I go further to stop on them for one moment. If I may venture to say so, put off your theological spectacles for a minute, and do not let us harden this thought down with any mere dogma that can be selected in the language of the creeds. Let us try and put it into words a little less hackneyed. Suppose, instead of talking about calling, you were to talk about inviting, summoning, beckoning; or I might use tenderer words still—beseeching, wooing, entreating; for all that lies in the thought. God summoning and calling, in that sense, men to Himself, by the raying out of His own perfect beauty, and the might with which the beams go forth into the darkness. Ah! is not that beautiful, dear brethren; that there is nothing more, indeed, for God to do to draw us to Himself than to let us see what He is! So perfectly fair, so sweet, so tender, so strong, so absolutely corresponding to all the necessities of our beings

and the hunger of our hearts, that when we see Him we cannot choose but love Him, and that He can do nothing more to call wandering hearts back to the light and sweetness of His own heart than to show them Himself. And so from all corners of His universe, and in every activity of His hand and heart and spirit, we can hear a voice saying, 'Son, give me thine heart.' 'Oh! taste and see that God is good.' 'Acquaint now thyself with Him and be at peace; thereby good shall come unto thee.'

But great and wonderful as such a thought seems to be when we look at it in the freshness which belongs to it, do you suppose that that was all that Peter was thinking about? Do you think that a wide, general, and if you leave it by itself, vague utterance like that which I have been indulging in, would give all the specific precision and fulness of the meaning of the word before us? I think not. I fancy that when this Apostle wrote these words he remembered a time long, long ago, when somebody stood by the little fishing-cobble there, and as the men were up to their knees in slush and dirt, washing their nets, said to them, 'Follow Me.' I think that was in Peter's estimate God's call to him by God's glory and by God's virtue. And so I pause there for a moment to say that all the lustrous pouring out of light, all that transcendent energy of active love, is not diffused nebulous through a universe; it is not even spread in that sense over all the deeds of His hand; but whilst it is everywhere, it has a focus and a centre and a fire. The fire is gathered into the Son, Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ in His manhood and in His Deity; Jesus Christ in His life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension, and kingly reign. The whole creation, as this New Testament pro-

claims Him to us, is God's glory and God's virtue, whereby He draws men to Himself. I cannot stay to dwell on that thought as I should be glad to do. Let me just remind you of the two parts into which it splits itself up; and I commend it, dogmatically as I have to state it in such an audience as this—I commend it to the multitudes of young men here present. The highest form of the Divine glory is Jesus Christ, not the attributes with which men clothe the Divinity, not those abstractions which you find in books of theology. All that is but the fringe of the glory. And I tell you, dear friends, the living white light at the centre and heart of all the radiance of the flame is the light of life which is conveyed into the gentle Christ. As the Apostle John has it, 'We beheld His glory.' Yes, and taking and binding together the two words which people have so often treated against each other, 'We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth,' the highest light in Him that says, 'I am the light of the world'—very light of very light. As a much maligned document has it, 'very light of very light,' the brightness of His glory, the irradiation of His splendour, and the express image of His person. And as the light so the power. Christ the power; power in its highest, noblest form, the power of patient gentleness and Divine suffering; power in its widest sweep, 'unto every one that believeth'; power in its most wondrous operation, 'the power of God unto salvation.' So I come to you, I hope, with one message on my lips and in my heart. If you want light, look to Christ. If you want to behold that unveiled face, the glory of the Lord, turn to Him, and let His sunshine smite you on the face as the light smote Stephen, and then you can say, 'He that hath seen

Him hath seen the Father.' My brother, the highest, noblest, perfect, and, as I believe, final form in which all God's glory, all God's energy, are gathered together, and make their appeal to you and me, was when a Galilean peasant stood up in a little knot of forgotten Jews and said to them, and through them to you and me, 'Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' He calls by His glory and by His virtue.

Now still further. Confining myself as before to the words as they lie here in this text, let me ask you to think, and that for a moment or two only, on the great and wondrous purpose which this Divine energy and light had in view in summoning us to itself. His Divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain to life and all things that pertain to godliness. Look at that! One of the old Psalms says: 'Gather my saints together unto me, those who have made a covenant with me by sacrifice; assemble them all before my throne, and I will judge my people.' Is that the last and final revelation of God's purpose of drawing men to Him? Is that why He sends out His heralds and summons through the whole intelligent creation? Nay, something better. Not to judge, not to scourge, not to chastise, not to avenge. To give. This is the meaning of that summons that comes out through the whole earth, 'Come up hither,' that when we get there we may be flooded with the richness of His mercy, and that He may pour His whole soul out over us in the greatness of His gifts. This is God, and the perpetual activity summoning men to Himself that there He may bless them. He makes our hearts empty that He may fill them. He shapes us as we are that we may need Him and may recreate ourselves in

Him. He says, 'Bring all your vessels and I will fill them full.' Now look in this part of my subject at what I may venture to call the magnificent confidence that this Peter has in the—what shall I say?—the encyclopædical—if I may use a long word—and universal character of God. All things that pertain to life, all things that pertain to godliness. And somebody says, 'Yes, that is tautology, that is saying the same thing twice over in different language.' Never mind, says Peter, so much the better, it will help to express the exuberant abundance and fulness. He takes a leaf out of his brother Paul's book. He is often guilty when he speaks of God's gifts of that same sin of tautology, as for instance, 'Now unto Him who is able to do exceeding, abundantly, above all'—there are four of them—'all that we can ask or think.' Yes, in all forms language is but faint and feeble, weak and poor in the presence of that great miracle of a love that passeth knowledge and that we may know the heights and depths. And so says our Apostle, 'All things that pertain to life, all things that pertain to godliness.' The whole circle all round, all the 360 degrees of it, God's love will come down and lie on the top of it as it were, superimposed, so that there should not be a single gift where there is a flaw or a defect. Everything you want of life, everything you want for godliness. Yes, of course, the gift must bear some kind of proportion to the giver. You do not expect a millionaire to put down half a crown to a subscription list if he gives anything at all. And God says to you and me, 'Come and look at My storehouses, count if you can those golden vases filled with treasure, look at those massive ingots of bullion, gaze into the vanishing distances of the infiniteness of My nature and of My possessions, and

then listen to Me. I give thee Myself—Myself, that ye may be filled with all the fulness of God. All things that pertain to life, all things that pertain to godliness. But I cannot pass on from this part of my subject without venturing one more remark. It is this: I do not suppose it is too minute, verbal criticism. This great encyclopædial gift is represented in my text, not as a thing that you are going to get, Christian men and women, but as a thing that you have gotten. And any of you that are able to test the correctness of my assertion will see I have thought the form of language used in the original is such as to point still more specifically than in our translation, to some one definite act in the past in which all that fulness of glory and virtue of life and godliness was given to us men. Is there any doubt as to what that is? We talk sometimes as if we had to ask God to give us more. God cannot give you any more than He gave you nineteen hundred years ago. It was all in Christ. Get a very vulgar illustration which is altogether inadequate for a great many purposes, but may serve for one. Suppose some man told you that there was a thousand pounds paid to your credit at a London bank, and that you were to get the use of it as you drew cheques against it. Well, the money is there, is it not? The gift is given, and yet for all that you may be dying, and half-dead, a pauper. I was reading a book only the other day which contained a story that comes in here. An Arctic expedition, some years ago, found an ammunition chest that Commander Parry had left fifty years ago, safe under a pile of stones. The wood of the chest had not rotted yet; the provisions inside of it were perfectly sweet, and good, and eatable. There it had lain all those years. Men had died of starvation within arm's length

of it. It was there all the same. And so, if I might venture to vulgarise the great theme that I try to speak about, God has given us His Son, and in Him, all that pertains to life and all that pertains to godliness. My brother, take the things that are freely given to you of God.

And so that leads me to one last word, and it shall only be a word, in regard to what our text tells us of the way by which on our side we can yield to this Divine call, and receive this Divine fulness of gifts, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory. Through the knowledge! Yes, well there are two kinds of knowledge, are there not? There is the knowledge by which you know a book, for instance, on the subject of study, and there is the knowledge by which you know one another; and the kind of thing I mean when I say, 'I know mathematics,' is entirely different to what I mean when I say, 'I know John, Thomas,' or whoever he may be. And I venture to say that the knowledge, which is the condition of receiving the whole fulness of the glory and the whole fulness of the light, is a great deal more like the thing we mean when we talk of knowing one another than when we talk of knowing a book. That is to say, a man may have all the creeds and confessions of faith clear in his head, and yet none of the life, none of the light, none of the power, and none of the godliness. But if we know Him as our brother, know Him as our friend, our sacrifice, our Redeemer, Lord, all in all; know Him as our heaven, our righteousness, and our strength; if we know Him with the knowledge which is possession; if we know Him with the knowledge which, as the profoundest of the Apostles says, 'hath the truth in life'; if we know Him, see then, 'This is life eternal, to know

Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent.'

Now, friends, my words are done. God is calling you. No, let us put it a little more definitely than that—God is calling *thee*. There is no speech nor language where His voice is not heard. His words are gone out to the end of the world, and have reached even thyself. He calls thee, oh! brother, sister, friend, that you and I may turn round to Him and say, 'When Thou saidst, Seek ye my face, my heart said unto Thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.' Amen.

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

'He hath given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the Divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.'—2 PETER i. 4.

'PARTAKERS of the Divine nature.' These are bold words, and may be so understood as to excite the wildest and most presumptuous dreams. But bold as they are, and startling as they may sound to some of us, they are only putting into other language the teaching of which the whole New Testament is full, that men may, and do, by their faith, receive into their spirits a real communication of the life of God. What else does the language about being 'the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty' mean? What else does the teaching of regeneration mean? What else mean Christ's frequent declarations that He dwells in us and we in Him, as the branch in the vine, as the members in the body? What else does 'he that is joined to the Lord in one spirit' mean? Do not all teach that in some most real sense the very pur-

pose of Christianity, for which God has sent His Son, and His Son has come, is that we, poor, sinful, weak, limited, ignorant creatures as we are, may be lifted up into that solemn and awful elevation, and receive in our trembling and yet strengthened souls a spark of God? 'That ye may be partakers of the Divine nature' means more than 'that you may share in the blessings which that nature bestows.' It means that into us may come the very God Himself.

I. So I want you to look with me, first, at this lofty purpose which is here presented as being the very aim and end of God's gift in the gospel.

The human nature and the Divine are both kindred and contrary. And the whole Bible is remarkable for the emphasis with which it insists upon both these elements of the comparison, declaring, on the one hand, as no other religion has ever declared, the supreme sovereign, unapproachable elevation of the infinite Being above all creatures, and on the other hand, holding forth the hope, as no other religion has ever ventured to do, of the possible union of the loftiest and the lowest, and the lifting of the creature into union with God Himself. There are no gods of the heathen so far away from their worshippers, and there are none so near them, as our God. There is no god that men have bowed before, so unlike the devotee; and there is no system which recognises that, as is the Maker so are the made, in such thorough-going fashion as the Bible does. The arched heaven, though high above us, it is not inaccessible in its serene and cloudless beauty, but it touches earth all round the horizon, and man is made in the image of God.

True, that divine nature of which the ideal man is the possessor has faded away from humanity. But still the

human is kindred with the divine. The drop of water is of one nature with the boundless ocean that rolls shoreless beyond the horizon, and stretches plumbless into the abysses. The tiniest spark of flame is of the same nature as those leaping, hydrogen spears of illuminated gas that spring hundreds of thousands of miles high in a second or two in the great central sun.

And though on the one hand there be finiteness and on the other infinitude: though we have to talk, in big words, of which we have very little grasp, about 'Omniscience,' and 'Omnipresence,' and 'Eternity,' and such like, these things may be deducted and yet the Divine nature may be retained; and the poor, ignorant, finite, dying creature, that perishes before the moth, may say, 'I am kindred with Him whose years know no end; whose wisdom knows no uncertainty nor growth; whose power is Omnipotence; and whose presence is everywhere.' He that can say, 'I am,' is of the same nature as His whose mighty proclamation of Himself is 'I AM THAT I AM.' He who can say 'I will' is of the same nature as He who willeth and it is done.

But that kindred, belonging to every soul of man, abject as well as loftiest, is not the 'partaking' of which my text speaks; though it is the basis and possibility of it; for my text speaks of men as '*becoming* partakers,' and of that participation as the result, not of humanity, but of God's gift of 'exceeding great and precious promises.' That creation in the image and likeness of God, which is represented as crowned by the very breath of God breathed into man's nostrils implies not only kindred with God in personality and self-conscious will, but also in purity and holiness. The moral kindred has darkened into unlikeness, but the other remains. It is not the gift

here spoken of, but it supplies the basis which makes that gift possible. A dog could not become possessor of the Divine nature, in the sense in which my text speaks of it. Any man, however bad, however foolish, however degraded, abject and savage, can become a partaker of it, and yet no man has it without something else than the fact of his humanity.

What, then, is it? No mere absorption, as extravagant mystics have dreamed, into that Divine nature, as a drop goes back into the ocean and is lost. There will always be 'I' and 'thou,' or else there were no blessedness, nor worship, nor joy. We must so partake of the Divine nature as that the bounds between the bestowing God and the partaking man shall never be broken down. But that being presupposed, union as close as is possible, the individuality of the giver and the receiver being untampered with is the great hope that all Christian men and women ought consciously to cherish.

Only mark, the beginning of the whole is the communication of a Divine life which is manifested mainly in what we call moral likeness. Or to put it into plain words, the teaching of my text is no dreamy teaching, such as an eastern mystic might proclaim, of absorption into an impersonal Divine. There is no notion here of any partaking of these great though secondary attributes of the Divine mind which to many men are the most God-like parts of His nature. But what my text mainly means is, you may, if you like, become 'holy as God is holy.' You may become loving as God is loving, and with a breath of His own life breathed into your hearts. The central Divinity in the Divine, if I may so say, is the amalgam of holiness and love. That is God; the rest is what belongs to God. God *has* power; God *is* love.

That is the regnant attribute, the spring that sets everything agoing. And so, when my text talks about making us all, if we will, partakers of a Divine nature, what it means, mainly, is this—that into every human spirit there may pass a seed of Divine life which will unfold itself there in all purity of holiness, in all tenderness and gentleness of love. ‘God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.’ Partakers we shall be in the measure in which by our faith we have drawn from Him the pure and the hearty love of whatever things are fair and noble; the measure in which we love righteousness and hate iniquity.

And then remember also that this lofty purpose which is here set forth is a purpose growingly realised in man. The Apostle puts great stress upon that word in my text, which, unfortunately, is not rendered adequately in our Bible, ‘that by these ye might *become* partakers of the Divine nature.’ He is not talking about a *being*, but about a *becoming*. That is to say, God must ever be passing, moment by moment, into our hearts if there is to be anything godly there. No more certainly must this building, if we are to see, be continually filled with light-beams that are urged from the central sun by its impelling force than the spirit must be receiving, by momentary communication, the gift of life from God if it is to live. Cut off the sunbeam from the sun and it dies, and the house is dark; cut off the life from the root and it withers, and the creature shrivels. The Christian man lives only by continual derivation of life from God; and for ever and ever the secret of his being and of his blessedness is not that he has become a possessor, but that he has become a partaker, of the Divine nature.

And that participation ought to, and will, be a growing

thing. By daily increase we shall be made capable of daily increase. Life is growth; the Divine life in Him is not growth, but in us it does grow, and our infancy will be turned into youth; and our youth into maturity; and, blessed be His name, the maturity will be a growing one, to which grey hairs and feebleness will never come, nor a term ever be set. More and more of God we may receive every day we live, and through the endless ages of eternity; and if we have Him in our hearts, we shall live as long as there is anything more to pass from God to us. Until the fountain has poured its whole fulness into the cistern, the cistern will never be broken. He who becomes partaker of the Divine nature can never die. So as Christ taught us the great argument for immortality is the present relation between God and us, and the fact that He is the God of Abraham points to the resurrection life.

II. Look, in the second place, at the costly and sufficient means employed for the realisation of this great purpose. 'He hath given to us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might become partakers,' etc.

Of course the mere words of a promise will not communicate this Divine life to men's souls. 'Promises' here must necessarily, I think, be employed in the sense of fulfilment of the promises. And so we might think of all the great and wondrous words which God has spoken in the past, promises of deliverance, of forgiveness, and the like; but I am rather disposed to believe that the extreme emphasis of the epithets which the Apostle selects to describe these promised things now fulfilled suggests another interpretation.

I believe that by these 'exceeding great and precious

promises' is meant the unspeakable gift of God's own Son, and the gift therein and thereafter of God's life-giving Spirit. For is not this the meaning of the central fact of Christianity, the incarnation—that the Divine becomes partaker of the human in order that the human may partake of the Divine? Is not Christ's coming the great proof that however high the heavens may stretch above the flat, sad earth, still the Divine nature and the human are so kindred that God can enter into humanity and be manifest in the flesh? Contrariety vanishes; the difference between the creature and the Creator disappears. These mere distinctions of power and weakness, of infinitude and finiteness, of wisdom and of ignorance, of undying being and decaying life, vanish, as of secondary consequence, when we can say, 'the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.' There can be no insuperable obstacle to man's being lifted up into a union with the Divine, since the Divine found no insuperable obstacle in descending to enter into union with the human.

So then, because God has given us His Son it is clear that we may become partakers of the Divine nature; inasmuch as He, the Divine, has become partaker of the children's flesh and blood, and in that coming of the Divine into the human there was brought the seed and the germ of a life which can be granted to us all. Brethren! there is one way, and one way only, by which any of us can partake of this great and wondrous gift of a share in God, and it is through Jesus Christ. 'No man hath ascended up into Heaven,' nor ever will either climb or fly there, 'save He that came down from Heaven; even the Son of man which is in Heaven.' And in Him we may ascend, and in Him we may receive God.

Christ is the true Prometheus, if I may so speak, who brings to earth in the fragile reed of his humanity the sacred and immortal fire which may be kindled in every heart. Open your hearts to Him by faith and He will come in, and with Him the rejoicing life which will triumph over the death of self and sin, and give to you a share in the nature of God.

III. Let me say, lastly, that this great text adds a human accompaniment of that Divine gift: 'Having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.'

The only condition of receiving this Divine nature is the opening of the heart by faith to Him, the Divine human Christ, who is the bond between men and God, and gives it to us. But that condition being presupposed, this important clause supplies the conduct which attends and attests the possession of the Divine nature.

Notice, here is human nature without God, described as 'the corruption that is in the world in lust.' It is like a fungus, foul-smelling, slimy, poisonous; whose growth looks rather the working of decay than of vitality. And, says my text, that is the kind of thing that human nature is if God is *not* in it. There is an 'either' and 'or' here. On the one hand we must have a share in the Divine nature, or, on the other, we have a share in the putrescence 'that is in the world through lust.'

Corruption is initial destruction, though of course other forms of life may come from it; destruction is complete corruption. The word means both. A man either escapes from lust and evil, or he is destroyed by it.

And the root of this rotting fungus is 'in lust,' which word, of course, is used in a much wider meaning than the fleshly sense in which we employ it in modern times. It means 'desire' of all sorts. The root of the world's corruption is my own and my brothers' unbridled and godless desires.

So there are two states—a life plunged in putridity, or a heart touched with the Divine nature. Which is it to be? It cannot be both. It must be one or the other. Which?

A man that has got the life of God, in however feeble measure, in him, will flee away from this corruption like Lot out of Sodom. And how will he flee out of it? By subduing his own desires; not by changing position, not by shirking duty, not by withdrawing himself into unwholesome isolation from men and men's ways. The corruption is not only 'in the world,' so that you could get rid of it by getting out of the world, but it is 'in the world in lust,' so that you carry the fountain of it within yourself. The only way to escape is by no outward flight, but by casting out the unclean thing from our own souls.

Depend upon it, the measure in which a man has the love of God in him can be very fairly estimated by the extent to which he is doing this. There is a test for you Christian people. There have been plenty of men and women in all ages of the Church, and they abound in this generation, who will make no scruple of declaring that they possess a portion of this Divine Spirit and a spark of God in their souls. Well then, I say, here is the test, bring it all to this—does that life within you cast out your own evil desires? If it does, well; if it does not, the less you say about Christ in your hearts the less

likely you will be to become either a hypocrite, or a self-deceiver.

And so, brethren, remember, one last word, viz., that whilst on the one hand whoever has the life of God in his heart will be fleeing from this corruption, on the other hand you can weaken—ay! and you can kill the Divine life by not so fleeing. You have got it, if you have it, to nourish, to cherish, and to do that most of all by obeying it. If you do not obey, and if habitually you keep the plant with all its buds picked off one after another as they begin to form, you will kill it sooner or later. You Christian men and women take warning. God has given you Jesus Christ. It was worth while for Christ to live; it was worth while for Christ to die, in order that into the souls of all sinful, God-forgetting, devil-following men there might pass this Promethean spark of the true fire.

You get it, if you will, by simple faith. You will not keep it unless you obey it. Mind you do not quench the Holy Spirit, and extinguish the very life of God in your souls.

THE POWER OF DILIGENCE

* Giving all diligence, add to your faith . . . —2 PETER i. 5.

It seems to me very like Peter that there should be so much in this letter about the very commonplace and familiar excellence of diligence. He over and over again exhorts to it as the one means to the attainment of all Christian graces, and of all the blessedness of the Christian life. We do not expect fine-spun counsels from a teacher whose natural bent is, like his, but plain, sturdy,

common sense, directed to the highest matter, and set aglow by fervent love to his Lord. The Apostle paints himself, and his own way of Christian living, when he thus frequently exhorts his brethren to 'give all diligence.' He says in this 'same chapter that he himself will 'give diligence [*endeavour*, in Authorised Version] that they may be able after his decease to have these things always in remembrance.' We seem to see Peter, not much accustomed to wield a pen, sitting down to what he felt a somewhat difficult task, and pointing the readers to his own example as an instance of the temper which they must cherish if they are to make anything of their Christian life. 'Just as I labour for your sakes at this unfamiliar work of writing, so do you toil at perfecting your Christian graces.'

Now it strikes me that we may gain some instruction if we throw together the various objects to which in Scripture, and especially in this letter, we are exhorted to direct this virtue of diligence, and mark how comprehensive its range, and how, for all beauty of character and progress in the Divine life, it is regarded as an indispensable condition. Let us then look, first, at the homely excellence that is the master-key to all Christian maturity and grace, and then at the various fields in which we are to apply it.

I. Now as to the homely virtue itself, 'giving all diligence.'

We all know what 'diligence' means, but it is worth while to point out that the original meaning of the word is not so much *diligence* as *haste*. It is employed, for instance, to describe the eager swiftness with which the Virgin went to Elizabeth after the angel's salutation and annunciation. It is the word employed to describe the

murderous hurry with which Herodias came rushing in to the king to demand John the Baptist's head. It is the word with which the Apostle, left solitary in his prison, besought his sole trusty companion Timothy to 'make haste so as to come to him before winter.' Thus, the first notion in the word is haste, which crowds every moment with continuous effort, and lets no hindrances entangle the feet of the runner. Wise haste has sometimes to be content to go slowly. 'Raw haste' is 'half sister to delay.' When haste degenerates into hurry, and becomes agitation, it is weakness, not strength; it turns out superficial work, which has usually to be pulled to pieces and done over again, and it is sure to be followed by reaction of languid idleness. But the less we hurry the more should we hasten in running the race set before us.

But with this caution against spurious haste, we cannot too seriously lay to heart the solemn motives to wise and well-directed haste. The moments granted to any of us are too few and precious to let slip unused. The field to be cultivated is too wide and the possible harvest for the toiler too abundant, and the certain crop of weeds in the sluggard's garden too poisonous, to allow dawdling to be considered a venial fault. Little progress will be made if we do not work as feeling that 'the night is far spent, the day is at hand,' or as feeling the apparently opposite but really identical conviction, 'I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day. The night cometh when no man can work.' The day of full salvation, repose, and blessedness is near dawning. The night of weeping, the night of toil, is nearly past. By both aspects of this brief life we should be spurred to haste.

The first element, then, in Christian diligence is economy of time as of most precious treasure, and the avoidance, as of a pestilence, of all procrastination. 'To-morrow and to-morrow' is the opiate with which sluggards and cowards set conscience asleep, and as each to-morrow becomes to-day it proves as empty of effort as its predecessors, and, when it has become yesterday, it adds one more to the solemn company of wasted opportunities which wait for a man at the bar of God. 'All their yesterdays have lighted' such idlers 'to dusty death,' because in each they were saying, 'to-morrow we will begin the better course,' instead of beginning it to-day. 'Now is the accepted time.' 'Wherefore, giving all haste, add to your faith.'

Another of the phases of the virtue, which Peter here regards as sovereign, is represented in our translation of the word by 'earnestness,' which is the parent of diligence. Earnestness is the sentiment, of which diligence is the expression. So the word is frequently translated. Hence we gather that no Christian growth is possible unless a man gives his mind to it. Dawdlers will do nothing. There must be fervour if there is to be growth. The heated bar of iron will go through the obstacle which the cold one will never penetrate. We must gather ourselves together under the impulse of an all-pervading and noble earnestness, too deep to be demonstrative, and which does not waste itself in noise, but settles down steadily to work. The engine that is giving off its steam in white puffs is not working at its full power. When we are most intent we are most silent. Earnestness is dumb, and therefore it is terrible.

Again we come to the more familiar translation of the word as in the text. 'Diligence' is the panacea for all

diseases of the Christian life. It is the homely virtue that leads to all success. It is a great thing to be convinced of this, that there are no mysteries about the conditions of healthy Christian living, but that precisely the same qualities which lead to victory in any career to which a man sets himself do so in this; that, on the one hand, we shall never fail if in earnest and saving the crumbs of moments, we give ourselves to the work of Christian growth; and that on the other hand, no fine emotions, no select moments of rapture and communion will ever avail to take the place of the dogged perseverance and prosaic hard work which wins in all other fields; and wins, and is the only thing that does win, in this one too. If you want to be a strong Christian—that is to say, a happy man—you must bend your back to the work and ‘give all diligence.’ Nobody goes to heaven in his sleep. No man becomes a vigorous Christian by any other course than ‘giving all diligence.’ It is a very lowly virtue. It is like some of the old wives’ recipes for curing diseases with some familiar herb that grows at every cottage door. People will not have that, but if you bring them some medicine from far away, very rare and costly, and suggest to them some course out of the beaten rut of ordinary, honest living, they will jump at that. Quackery always deals in mysteries and rare things. The great physician cures diseases with simples that grow everywhere. A pennyworth of some familiar root will cure an illness that nothing else will touch. It is a homely virtue, but if in its homeliness we practised it, this Church and our own souls would wear a different face from what it and they do to-day.

II. Note the wide field of action for this homely grace.

I can do nothing more—nor is it necessary that I should—than put before your mind, in a sentence or two, the various applications of it which our letter gives.

First, note that in our text, ‘giving all diligence, add to your faith.’ That is to say, unless you work with haste, with earnestness, and therefore with much putting forth of strength, your faith will not evolve the graces of character which is in it to bring forth. If, on the other hand, we set ourselves to our tasks, then out of faith will come, as the blossoms mysteriously and miraculously do out of an apparently dead stump, virtue, manliness, and knowledge, and temperance, and patience, and godliness, and brotherly mindedness, and charity. All that galaxy of light and beauty will shine forth on the one condition of diligence, and it will not appear without that. Without it, the faith, though it may be genuine, which lies in a man who is idle in cultivating Christian character, will bear but few and shrivelled fruits. The Apostle uses a very remarkable expression here, which is rendered in our Bible imperfectly ‘giving all diligence.’ He has just been saying that God has ‘given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, and exceeding great and precious promises.’ The Divine gift, then, is everything that will help a man to live a high and godly life. And, says Peter, on this very account, because you have all these requisites for such a life already given you, see that you ‘bring besides into’ the heap of gifts, as it were, that which you and only you can bring, namely, ‘all diligence.’ The phrase implies that diligence is our contribution. And the very reason for exercising it is the completeness of God’s gift. ‘On this very account’—because He has given so much—we are to lay ‘all diligence’ by the side of His gifts, which are useless to the sluggard.

On the one hand there are all great gifts and boundless possibilities as to life and godliness, and on the other diligence as the condition on which all these shall actually become ours, and, passing into our lives, will there produce all these graces which the Apostle goes on to enumerate. The condition is nothing recondite, nothing hard either to understand or to practise, but it is simply that commonplace, humdrum virtue of diligence. If we will put it forth, then the gifts that God has given, and which are not really ours unless we put it forth, will pass into the very substance of our being, and unfold themselves according to the life that is in them; even the life that is in Jesus Christ Himself, in all forms of beauty and sweetness and power and blessedness. 'Diligence' makes faith fruitful. Diligence makes God's gifts ours.

Then, again, the Apostle gives an even more remarkable view of the possible field for this all-powerful diligence when he bids his readers exercise it in order to 'make their calling and election sure.' Peter's first letter shows that he believed that Christians were 'chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.' But for all that he is not a bit afraid of putting the other side of the truth, and saying to us in effect. 'We cannot read the eternal decrees of God nor know the names written in the Book of Life. These are mysteries above us. But if you want to be sure that you are one of the called and chosen, work and you will get the assurance.' The confirmation of the 'call,' of the 'election,' both in fact and in my consciousness depends upon my action. The 'diligence,' of which the Apostle thinks such great things, reaches, as it were, a hand up into heaven and binds a man to that great unrevealed, electing purpose of God. If we desire that upon our Christian lives there shall shine the per-

petual sunshine of an unclouded confidence that we have the love and the favour of God, and that for us there is no condemnation, but only 'acceptance in the beloved,' the short road to it is the well-known and trite path of toil in the Christian life.

Still further, one of the other writers of the New Testament gives us another field in which this virtue may expatiate, when the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews exhorts to diligence, in order to attain 'the full assurance of hope.' If we desire that our path should be brightened by the clear vision of our blessed future beyond the grave, and above the stars, and within the bosom of God, the road to that happy assurance and sunny, cloudless confidence in a future of rest and fellowship with God lies simply here—work! as Christian men should, whilst it is called to-day.

The last of the fields in which this virtue finds exercise is expressed by our letter, when Peter says, 'Seeing that we look for such things, let us *be diligent*, that we may be found of Him in peace without spot, and blameless.' If we are to be 'found in peace,' we must be 'found spotless,' and if we are to be 'found spotless' we must be 'diligent.' 'If that servant begin to say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and to be slothful, and to eat and drink with the drunken, the lord of that servant will come in an hour when he is not aware.' On the other hand, 'who is that faithful servant whom his lord hath set ruler over his household? Blessed is that servant whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing?' Doing so, and diligently doing it, 'he shall be found in peace.'

What a beautiful ideal of Christian life results from putting together all these items. A fruitful faith, a sure

calling, a cloudless hope, a peaceful welcome at last! The Old Testament says, 'The hand of the diligent maketh rich'; the New Testament promises unchangeable riches to the same hand. The Old Testament says, 'Seest thou a man diligent in his business, he shall stand before kings.' The New Testament assures us that the noblest form of that promise shall be fulfilled in the Christian man's communion with his Lord here, and perfected when the diligent disciple shall 'be found of Him in peace,' and stand before the King in that day, accepted and himself a king.

GOING OUT AND GOING IN

'An entrance . . . my decease,'—2 PETER i. 11, 15.

I DO not like, and do not often indulge in, the practice of taking fragments of Scripture for a text, but I venture to isolate these two words, because they correspond to one another, and when thus isolated and connected, bring out very prominently two aspects of one thing. In the original the correspondence is even closer, for the words, literally rendered, are 'a going in' and 'a going out.' The same event is looked at from two sides. On the one it is a departure; on the other it is an arrival. That event, I need not say, is Death.

I note, further, that the expression rendered, 'my decease,' employs the word which is always used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to express the departure of the Children of Israel from bondage, and which gives its name, in our language, to the Second Book of the Pentateuch. 'My exodus'—associations suggested by the word can scarcely fail to have been in the writer's mind.

Further, I note that this expression for Death is only employed once again in the New Testament—viz., in St. Luke's account of the Transfiguration, where Moses and Elias spake with Jesus 'concerning His decease—the exodus—which He should accomplish at Jerusalem.' If you look on to the verses which follow the second of my texts, you will see that the Apostle immediately passes on to speak about that Transfiguration, and about the voice which He heard then in the holy mount. So that I think we must suppose that in the words of our second text he was already beginning to think about the Transfiguration, and was feeling that, somehow or other, his 'exodus' was to be conformed to his Master's.

Now bearing all these points in mind, let us just turn to these words and try to gather the lessons which they suggest.

I. The first of them is this, the double Christian aspect of death.

It is well worth noting that the New Testament very seldom condescends to use that name for the mere physical fact of dissolution. It reserves it for the most part for something a great deal more dreadful than the separation of body and soul, and uses all manner of periphrases, or what rhetoricians call euphemising, that is, gentle expressions which put the best face upon a thing instead of the ugly word itself. It speaks, for instance, as you may remember, in the context here about the 'putting off' of a tent or 'a tabernacle,' blending the notions of stripping off a garment and pulling down a transitory abode. It speaks about death as a sleep, and in that and other ways sets it forth in gracious and gentle aspects, and veils the deformity, and loves and hopes away the dreadfulness of it.

Now other languages and other religions besides Christianity have done the same things, and Roman and Greek poets and monuments have in like manner avoided the grim, plain word—death, but they have done it for exactly the opposite reason from that for which the Christian does it. They did it because the thing was so dark and dismal, and because they knew so little and feared so much about it. And Christianity does it for exactly the opposite reason, because it fears it not at all, and knows it quite enough. So it toys with leviathan, and ‘lays its hand on the cockatrice den,’ and my text is an instance of this.

‘My decease . . . an entrance.’ So the terribleness and mystery dwindled down into this—a change of position; or if locality is scarcely the right class of ideas to apply to spirits detached from the body—a change of condition. That is all.

We do not need to insist upon the notion of change of place. For, as I say, we get into a fog when we try to associate place with pure spiritual existence. But the root of the conviction which is expressed in both these phrases, and most vividly by their juxtaposition, is this, that what happens at death is not the extinction, but the withdrawal, of a person, and that the man *is*, as fully, as truly as he was, though all the relations in which he stands may be altered.

Now no materialistic teaching has any right to come in and bar that clear faith and firm conclusion. For by its very saying that it knows nothing about life except in connection with organisation, it acknowledges that there is a difference between them. And until science can tell me how it is that the throb of a brain or the quiver of a nerve, becomes transformed into morality,

into emotion, I maintain that it knows far too little of personality and of life to be a valid authority when it asserts that the destruction of the organisation is the end of the man. I feel myself perfectly free—in the darkness in which, after all investigation, that mysterious transformation of the physical into the moral and the spiritual lies—I feel perfectly free to listen to another voice, the voice which tells me that life can subsist, and that personal being can be as full—ay, fuller—apart altogether from the material frame which here, and by our present experience, is its necessary instrument. And though accepting all that physical investigation can teach us, we can still maintain that its light does not illumine the central obscurity; and that, after all, it still remains true that round about the being of each man, as round about the being of God, clouds and darkness roll,

‘Life and thought have gone away,
Side by side,
Leaving door and window wide.’

That, and nothing more, is death—‘My decease . . . an entrance.’

Then, again, the combination of these two words suggests to us that the one act, in the same moment, is both departure and arrival. There is not a pin-point of space, not the millionth part of a second of time, intervening between the two. There is no long journey to be taken. A man in straits, and all but desperation, is recorded in the old Book to have said: ‘There is but a step between me and death.’ Ah, there is but a step between death and the Kingdom; and he that passes out at the same moment passes in.

I need not say a word about theories which seem to me

to have no basis at all in our only source of information, which is Revelation; theories which would interpose a long period of unconsciousness—though to the man unconscious it be no period at all—between the act of departure and that of entrance. Not so do I read the teaching of Scripture: 'This day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise.' We pass out, and as those in the vestibule of a presence-chamber have but to lift the curtain and find themselves face to face with the king, so we, at one and the same moment, depart and arrive.

Friends stand round the bed, and before they can tell by the undimmed mirror that the last breath has been drawn, the saint is 'with Christ, which is far better.' To depart *is* to be with Him. There is a moment in the life of every believing soul in which there strangely mingle the lights of earth and the lights of heaven. As you see in dissolving views, the one fades and the other consolidates. Like the mighty angel in the Apocalypse, the dying man stands for a moment with one foot on the earth and the other already laved and cleansed by the waters of that sea of glass mingled with fire which is before the Throne,' 'Absent from the body; present with the Lord.'

Further, these two words suggest that the same act is emancipation from bondage and entrance into royalty.

'My exodus.' Israel came out of Egyptian servitude and dropped chains from wrists and left taskmasters cracking their useless whips behind them, and the brick kilns and the weary work were all done when they went forth. Ah, brethren, whatever beauty and good and power and blessedness there may be in this mortal life, there are deep and sad senses in which, for all of us, it is a prison-house and a state of captivity. There is a

bondage of flesh; there is a dominion of the animal nature; there are limitations, like high walls, cribbing, cabining, confining us—the limitations of circumstance. There is the slavery of dependence upon this poor, external, and material world. There are the tyranny of sin and the subjugation of the nobler nature to base and low and transient needs. All these fetters, and the scars of them, drop away. Joseph comes out of prison to a throne. The kingdom is not merely one in which the redeemed man is a subject, but one in which he himself is a prince. 'Have thou authority over ten cities.' These are the Christian aspects of death.

II. Now note, secondly, the great fact on which this view of death builds itself.

I have already remarked that in one of my texts the Apostle seems to be thinking about Jesus Christ and His decease. The context also refers to another incident in his own life, when our Lord foretold to him that the putting off his tabernacle was to be 'sudden,' and added: 'Follow thou Me.'

Taking these allusions into account, they suggest that it is the death of Jesus Christ—and that which is inseparable from it, His Resurrection—that changes for a soul believing on Him the whole aspect of that last experience that awaits us all. It is His exodus that makes 'my exodus' a deliverance from captivity and an entrance upon royalty.

I need not remind you, how, after all is said and done, we are sure of life eternal, because Jesus Christ died and rose again. I do not need to depreciate other imperfect arguments which seem to point in that direction, such as the instincts of men's natures, the craving for some retribution beyond, the impossibility of believing that life

is extinguished by the fact of physical death. But whilst I admit that a good deal may be said, and strong probabilities may be alleged, it seems to me that however much you may argue, no words, no considerations, moral or intellectual, can suffice to establish more than that it would be a very good thing if there were a future life and that it is probable that there is. But Jesus Christ comes to us and says, 'Touch Me, handle Me; a spirit hath not flesh and bones as I have. Here I am. I *was* dead; I *am* alive for evermore.' So then *one* life, that we know about, *has* persisted undiminished, apart from the physical frame, and that one Man has gone down into the dark abyss, and has come up the same as when He descended. So it is His exodus—and, as I believe, His death and Resurrection alone—on which the faith in immortality impregably rests.

But that is not the main point which the text suggests. Let me remind you how utterly the whole aspect of any difficulty, trial, or sorrow, and especially of that culmination of all men's fears—death itself—is altered when we think that in the darkest bend of the dark road we may trace footsteps, not without marks of blood in them, of Him that has trodden it all before us. 'Follow thou Me,' He said to Peter; and it should be no hard thing for us, if we love Him, to tread where He trod. It should be no lonely road for us to walk, however the closest clinging hands may be untwined from our grasp, and the most utter solitude of which a human soul is capable may be realised, when we remember that Jesus Christ has walked it before us.

The entrance, too, is made possible because He has preceded us. 'I go to prepare a place for you.' So we may be sure that when we go through those dark gates and

across the wild, the other side of which no man knows, it is not to step out of 'the warm precincts of the cheerful day' into some dim, cold, sad land, but it is to enter into His presence.

Israel's exodus was headed by a mummy case, in which the dead bones of their whilom leader were contained. Our exodus is headed by the Prince of Life, who was dead and is alive for evermore.

So, brethren, I beseech you, treasure these thoughts more than you do. Turn to Jesus Christ and His resurrection from the dead more than you do. I may be mistaken, but it seems to me that the Christianity of this day is largely losing the habitual contemplation of immortality which gave so much of its strength to the religion of past generations. We are all so busy in setting forth and enforcing the blessings of Christianity in its effects in the present life that, I fear me, we are largely forgetting what it does for us at the end, and beyond the end. And I would that we all thought more of our exodus and of our entrance in the light of Christ's death and resurrection. Such contemplation will not unfit us for any duty or any enjoyment. It will lift us above the absorbed occupation with present trivialities, which is the bane of all that is good and noble. It will teach us 'a solemn scorn of ills.' It will set on the furthest horizon a great light instead of a doleful darkness, and it will deliver us from the dread of that 'shadow feared of man,' but not by those who, listening to Jesus Christ, have been taught that to depart is to be with Him.

III. Now I meant to have said a word, in the close of my sermon, about a third point—viz., the way of securing that this aspect of death shall be our experience, but

your time will not allow of my dwelling upon that as I should have wished. I would only point out that, as I have already suggested, this context teaches us that it is His death that must make our deaths what they may become; and would ask you to notice, further, that the context carries us back to the preceding verses. 'An entrance shall be *ministered* unto you *abundantly*.' We have just before read, 'If these things be in you and *abound*, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ'; and just before is the exhortation, 'giving all diligence, minister to your faith virtue.'

So the Apostle, by reiterating the two words which he had previously been using, teaches us that if death is to be to us that departure from bondage and entrance into the Kingdom, we must here and now bring forth the fruits of faith. There is no entrance hereafter, unless there has been a habitual entering into the Holy Place by the blood of Jesus Christ even whilst we are on earth. There is no entrance by reason of the fact of death, unless all through life there has been an entrance into rest by reason of the fact of faith.

And so, dear brethren, I beseech you to remember that it depends on yourself whether departing shall be arrival, and exodus shall be entrance. One thing or other that last moment must be to us all—either a dragging us reluctant away from what we would fain cleave to, or a glad departure from a foreign land and entrance to our home. It may be as when Peter was let out of prison, the angel touched him, and the chains fell from his hands, and the iron gate opened of its own accord, and he found himself in the city. It is for you to settle which of the two it shall be. And if you will take Him

for your King, Companion, Saviour, Enlightener, Life here, 'the Lord shall bless your going out and coming in from this time forth and even for evermore.'

THE OWNER AND HIS SLAVES

Denying the Lord that bought them.'—2 PETER II. 1.

THE institution of slavery was one of the greatest blots on ancient civilisation. It was twice cursed, cursing both parties, degrading each, turning the slave into a chattel, and the master, in many cases, into a brute. Christianity, as represented in the New Testament, never says a word to condemn it, but Christianity has killed it. 'Make the tree good and its fruit good.' Do not aim at institutions, change the people that live under them and you change *them*. Girdle the tree and it will die, and save you the trouble of felling it. But not only does Christianity never condemn slavery, though it was in dead antagonism to all its principles, and could not possibly survive where its principles were accepted, but it also takes this essentially immoral relation and finds a soul of goodness in the evil thing, which serves to illustrate the relation between God and man, between Christ and us. It does with slavery as it does with war, uses what is good in it as illustrating higher truths, and trusts to the operation, the slow operation of its deepest principles for its destruction.

So, then, we have one Apostle, in his letters, binding on his forehead as a crown the designation, 'Paul,' a *slave* of 'Jesus Christ,' and we have in my text an expanded allusion to slavery. The word that is here rendered

rightly enough, 'Lord,' is the word which has been transferred into English as 'despot,' and it carries with it some suggestion of the roughness and absoluteness of authority which that word suggests to us. It does not mean merely 'master,' it means 'owner,' and it suggests an unconditional authority, to which the only thing in us that corresponds is abject and unconditional submission. That is what Christ is to you and me; the Lord, the Despot, the Owner.

But we have not only owner and slave here; we have one of the ugliest features of the institution referred to. You have the slave-market, 'the Lord that *bought* them,' and because He purchased them, owns them. Think of the hell of miseries that are connected with that practice of buying and selling human flesh, and then estimate the magnificent boldness of the metaphor which Peter does not scruple to take from it here, speaking of the owner who acquired them by a price. And not only that, but slaves will run away, and when they are stopped, and asked who they belong to, will say they know nothing about him. And so here is the runaway's denial, 'denying the Lord that bought them.' Now I ask you to think of these three points.

I. Here we have the Owner of us all.

I do not need, I suppose, to spend a moment in showing you that this relationship, which is laid down in our text, subsists between Jesus Christ and men, and it subsists between Jesus Christ and all men. For the people about whom the Apostle is saying that they have 'denied the Lord that bought them' can, by no construction, be supposed to be true Christians, but were enemies that had crept into the Church without any real allegiance to Jesus Christ, and were trying to wreck it, and to destroy

His work. So there is no reference here to a little elected group out of the midst of humanity, who especially belonged to Jesus Christ, and for whom the price has been paid; but the outlook of my text in its latter portion is as wide as humanity. The Lord—that is, Jesus Christ—owns all men.

Let me expand that thought in one or two illustrations which may help to make it perhaps more vivid. The slave's owner has absolute authority over him. You remember the occasion when a Roman officer, by reflecting upon the military discipline of the legion, and the mystical power that the commander's word had to set all his men in obedient activity, had come to the conclusion that, somehow or other, this Jesus whom he desired to heal his servant had a similar power in the material universe, and that just as he, subordinate officer though he was, had yet—by reason of the fact that he was 'under authority,' and an organ of a higher authority—the power to say to his servant, 'Go,' and he would go; and to another one, 'Come,' and he would come; so this Christ had power to say to disease, 'Depart,' and it would depart; and to health, 'Come,' and it would come; and to all the material forces of the universe, 'Do this,' and obediently they would do it. That is the picture, in another region, of the relation which Jesus Christ bears to men, though, alas, it is not the picture of the relation which men bear to Christ. But to all of us He has the right to say, wherever we are, 'Come,' the right to say, 'Go,' the right to say, 'Do,' the right to say, 'Be this, that, and the other thing.'

Absolute authority is His; what should be yours? Unconditional submission. My friend, it is no use your calling yourself a Christian unless that is your attitude. My

sermon to-night has something else to do than simply to present truths to you. It has to press truths on you, and to appeal not only to your feelings, not only to your understandings, but to your wills. And so I come with this question: Do you, dear friend, day by day, yield to the absolute Master the absolute submission? And is that rebellious will—which is in you, as it is in us all—tamed and submitted so as that you can say, ‘Speak, Lord! Thy servant heareth’? Is it?

Further, the owner has the right, as part of that absolute authority of which I have been speaking, to settle without appeal each man’s work. In those Eastern monarchies where the king was surrounded, not by constitutional ministers, but by his personal slaves, he made one man a shoeblack or a pipe-bearer, and the man standing next to him his prime minister. And neither the one nor the other had the right to say a word. Jesus Christ has the right to regulate your life in all its details, to set you your tasks. Some of us will get what the world vulgarly calls ‘more important duties’; some will get what the world ignorantly calls more ‘insignificant’ ones. What does that matter? It was our Owner that set us to our work, and if He tells us to black shoes, let us black them with all the pith of our elbows, and with the best blacking and brushes we can find; and if He sets us to work, which people think is more important and more conspicuous, let us do that too, in the same spirit, and for the same end.

Again, the owner has the absolute right of possession of all the slave’s possessions. He gets a little bit of land in the corner of his master’s plantation, and grows his vegetables, yams, pumpkins, a leaf of tobacco or two, or what not, there. And if his master comes along and

says, 'These are mine,' the slave has no resource, and is obliged to accept the conditions and to give them up. So Jesus Christ claims ours as well as us—ours because He claims us—and whilst, on the other hand, the surrender of external good is incomplete without the surrender of the inward will, on the other hand the abandonment and surrender of the inward life is incomplete, if it be not hypocritical, without the surrender of external possessions. All the slave's goods belonged to the owner.

And the owner has another right. He can say, 'Take that man's child and sell him in the market!' and he can break up the family ties and separate husband and wife, and parent and child, and not a word can be said. Our Master comes, not with rough authority, but with loving, though absolute authority, and He sometimes untwines the hands that are most closely clasped, and says to the one of the two that have grown together in love and blessedness, 'Come!' and he cometh, and to the other 'Go!' and she goeth. Blessed they who can say, 'It is the Lord! Let Him do what seemeth Him good.'

Now, dear friends, this absolute authority cannot be exercised by any man upon another man, and this unconditional submission, which Jesus Christ asks from us all, ought not to be rendered by any man to a man. It is a degradation when a human creature is put even in the external relation of slavery and servitude to another human creature, but it is an honour when Jesus Christ says to me, 'Thou art Mine,' and I say to Him, 'I am Thine, O Lord, truly I am Thy servant; Thou hast loosed my bonds.' In the old Saxon monarchies, some antiquarians tell us, the foundation of our modern nobility or aristocracy is found in that the king's servants became

nobles. Jesus Christ's slave is everybody else's master. And it is the highest honour that a man can have to bow himself before that Lord, and to take His yoke upon him and learn of Him. So much, then, for my first point: now a word with regard to the second.

II. The sale, and the price.

'The Lord that bought them.' You perhaps remember other words which say, 'Ye are bought with a price; be not the servants of men'; also other words of this Apostle himself, in which he speaks, in his other letter, of being 'bought with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot.' Now notice, Christ's ownership of us does not depend on Christ's Divinity, which I suppose most of us believe, but on Christ's sacrifice for us. It is perfectly true that creation gives rights to the Creator. It is perfectly true that if we believe, as I think the New Testament teaches, that He, who before His name was Jesus was the Eternal Word of God, was the Agent of all Creation, and therefore has rights. But Christ's heart does not care for rights of that sort. It wants something far deeper, far tenderer, far closer than any such. And He comes to us with the language that is the language of love over all the universe, as between man and woman, as between man and man, as between man and God, as between God and man, upon His lips, and says, 'Thou must love Me, for I have died for thee.' Yes, brother; the only ground upon which absolute possession of a man can be rested is the ground of prior absolute surrender to Him. Christ must give Himself to me before He can ask me to give myself to Him. So all that was apparently harsh in the relationship, as I have been trying to set it forth to you, melts away and disappears. No owner ever owned a slave as

truly as a loving woman owns her husband, or a loving husband his wife, because the ownership is the expression of perfect love on both sides. And that is the golden bond that binds men's souls to Christ in a submission which, the more abject it is, the more elevating it is, just because 'He loved me, and gave Himself for me.'

I do not dwell upon any cold theological doctrine of an Atonement, but I wish you to feel that deep in this great metaphor of our text there lie the two things; first, the price that was paid, and, second, the bondage from which the slave was delivered. He belonged to another master before Christ bought him for Himself. 'He that committeth sin is the slave of sin.' Some of you are your own despots, your own tyrants. The worse half of you has got the upper hand. The mutineers that ought to have been down under hatches, and shackled, have taken possession of the deck and clapped the captain and the officers, and all the sextants and log-books, away into a corner, and they are driving the ship—that is, you—on to the rocks, as hard as they can. A man that is not Christ's slave has a far worse slavery in submitting to these tyrant sins that have tempted him with the notion of how fine it is to break through these old-womanly restraints and conventional fads of a narrow morality, and to have his fling, and do as he likes and follow nature. Ay, some of you have been doing that, and could write a far better commentary than any preacher ever wrote, out of your own experience, on the great words, 'Whilst they promised them liberty, they themselves are the slaves of corruption!' Young men, is that true about any of you—that you came here into Manchester to a situation, and lonely lodgings, comparatively innocent, and that some-

body said, 'Oh, do not be a milksop! come along and see life,' and you thought it was fine to shake off the shackles that your poor old mother used to try to put upon your limbs? And what have you made of it? I will tell you what a great many young men have made of it—I have seen scores of them in the forty years that I have been preaching here: 'His bones are full of the iniquity of his youth, which shall lie down with him in the dust.'

There is a slavery which is blessedness, and there is a slavery which at first is delightful to the worst part of us, and afterwards becomes bitter and deadly. And it is the bondage of sin, the bondage to my worst self, the bondage to my indulged passions, the bondage to other men, the bondage to the material world. Jesus Christ speaks to each of us in His great sacrifice, by which He says to us, 'The Son will make you free, and you shall be free indeed.' The Lord has bought us. Have you let Him emancipate you from all your bondage? Dear friends, bear with me if I press again upon you, I pray God that it may ring in your ears till you can answer that question, Jesus Christ having bought me, do I belong to Him?

III. And now, lastly, notice the runaways.

Did it ever occur to you what a pathetic force there is in Peter's picking out that word 'denying' as the shorthand expression for all sorts of sins? Who was it that thrice denied that he knew Him? That experience went very deep into the Apostle; and here, as I take it, is a most significant illustration of his penitent remembrance of his past life, all the more significant because of its reticence. The allusion is one that nobody could catch that did not know his past, but which to those who did

know it was full of meaning and of pathos:—‘Denying the Lord, as *I* did on that dismal morning, in the High Priest’s palace. I am speaking about it, for I know what it comes to, and the tears that will follow after.’

But what I desire to press upon you, dear friends, is just this: That in that view of the lives of people who are not Christians there is suggested to us the essential sinfulness, the black ingratitude, and the absolute folly of refusing to acknowledge the claims of Him to whom we belong, and who has bought us at such a price. You can do it by word, and perhaps some of us are not guiltless in that respect. You can do it by paring down the character and office of Jesus Christ, and minimising the importance of His sacrifice from the world’s sins, and thinking of Him, not as the Owner that bought us, but as the Master that teaches us. You can do it by cowardly hiding of your colours and being too shamefaced, too sensitive to the curled lip of the man that works at the next bench, or sits at the next desk, or the student that is beside you, or somebody else whose opinion you esteem, which prevents you from saying like a man, ‘I belong to Jesus Christ, and whomsoever other people serve, as for me, I am going to serve Him.’ And you can do it, and many of you are doing it, by simply ignoring His claims, refusing to turn to Him, not yielding up your will to Him, not turning your heart to Him, not setting your dependence upon Him. Is it not a shame that men, whose hearts will glow with thankfulness when another man, especially if he is a superior, comes to them with some gift, valuable, but nothing as compared with the transcendent gift that Christ brings, will yet let Him die for them and not care anything about Him? I can under-

stand the vehement antagonism that some people have to Christ and Christianity, but what I cannot understand is the attitude of the immense mass of people that come to services like this, who profess to believe that Jesus Christ's love for them brought Him to the cross, and yet will not even pay the poor tribute of a little interest and a momentary inclination of heart towards Him. 'Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by,' that Jesus Christ died for you? He bought you for His own. Let me beseech you to 'yield yourselves' servants, slaves of Christ, and then you will be free, and you will hear Him say in the very depth of your hearts, 'Henceforth I call you not slaves, but friends.'

BE DILIGENT

'Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless.'—2 PETER iii. 14.

AS we pass the conventional boundary of another year, most of us, I suppose, cast glances into the darkness ahead. To those of us who have the greater part of our lives probably before us, the onward look will disclose glad possibilities. To some of us, who have life mostly behind us, the prospect will take 'a sober colouring from an eye that hath kept watch over man's mortality,' and there will be little on the lower levels to attract. My text falls in with the mood which the season fosters. It directs our onward look to a blessed certainty instead of a peradventure, and it deduces important practical consequences from the hope. These three things are in the words of our text: a clear vision that should fill the future; a definite aim for life, drawn from the vision; and

an earnest diligence in the pursuit of that aim, animated by that hope.

Now these three—a bright hope, a sovereign purpose, and a diligent earnestness—are the three conditions of all noble life. They themselves are strength, and they will bring us buoyancy and freshness which will prolong youth into old age, and forbid anything to appear uninteresting or small.

So I ask you to look at these three points, as suggested by my text.

I. First, then, the clear hope which should fill our future.

‘Seeing that ye look for such things.’ What things? Peter has been drawing a very vivid and solemn picture of the end, in two parts, one destructive, the other constructive. Anticipating the predictions of modern science, which confirm his prophecy, he speaks of the dissolution of all things by fervent heat, and draws therefrom the lesson: ‘What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?’

But that dissolution by fire is not, as people often call it, the ‘final conflagration.’ Rather is it a regenerating baptism of fire, from which ‘the heavens and the earth that now are’—like the old man in the fable, made young in the flame—shall emerge renewed and purified. The lesson from that prospect is the words of our text.

Now I am not going to dwell upon that thought of a new heaven and a new earth renewed by means of the fiery change that shall pass upon them, but simply to remark that there is a great deal in the teaching of both Old and New Testaments which seems to look in that direction. It is, at least, a perfectly tenable belief, and in my humble judgment is something more, that this

earth, the scene of man's tragedy and crime, the theatre of the display of the miracle of redeeming love, emancipated from the bondage of corruption, shall be renewed and become the seat of the blessed. They who dwell in it, and it on which they dwell pass through analogous changes, and as for the individuals, the 'new creation' is the old self purified by the fire of the Divine Spirit into incorruption and righteousness, so the world in which they live shall, in like manner, be 'that new world which is the old,' only having suffered the fiery transformation and been glorified thereby.

But passing from that thought, which, however interesting it may be as a matter of speculation, is of very small practical importance, notice, still further, the essential part of the hope which the Apostle here sets forth—viz., that that order of things towards which we may look is one permeable only for feet that have been washed and made clean. 'Therein dwelleth righteousness.' *Righteousness* there, of course, is the abstract for the concrete; the quality is put for the persons that exhibit it. And just as the condition of being at home in this present material world is the possession of flesh and blood, which puts creatures into relationships therewith, and just as it is impossible for a finite, bodyless spirit to move amongst, and influence, and be influenced by, the gross materialities of the heavens and the earth that now are, so is it impossible for anything but purity to be at rest in, or even to enter into that future world. 'The gates' of the New Jerusalem 'shall not be closed day nor night'; but through the ever-open gates none can pass except they who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. There stand at the gates of that Paradise unseen, the repulsions of the angel

with the flaming sword, and none can enter except the righteous. Light kills the creatures of the darkness.

'How pure that soul must be
Which, placed within Thy piercing sight,
Shall shrink not, but with calm delight
Can live, and look on Thee!'

Thus, then, brethren, an order of things free from all corruption, and into which none can pass but the pure, should be the vision that ever flames before us. Peter takes it for granted that the anticipation of that future is an inseparable part of the Christian character. The word which he employs, by its very form, expresses that that expectance is habitual and continuous. I am afraid that a great many so-called Christians very seldom send their thoughts, and still less frequently their desires, onwards to that end. In all your dreams of the future, how much space has been filled by this future which is no dream? Have you, in these past days, and do you, as a matter of habitual and familiar occupation of your mind, let your eyes travel on beyond and above the low levels of earth and peradventures, to fix them on that certainty?

Opticians make glasses with three ranges, and write upon a little bar which shifts their eyepieces, 'Theatre,' 'Field,' 'Marine.' Which of the three is your glass set to? The turn of a button determines its range. You can either look at the things close at hand, or, if you set the eyepiece right and use the strongest, you can see the stars. Which is it to be? The shorter range shows you possibilities; the longer will show you certainties. The shorter range shows you trifles; the longer, all that you can desire. The shorter range shows you hopes that are destined to be outgrown and left behind; the longer, the

far-off glories, a pillar of light which will move before you for ever. Oh, how many of the hopes that guided our course, and made our objective points in the past, are away down below the backward horizon! How many hopes we have outgrown, whether they were fulfilled or disappointed. But we may have one which will ever move before us, and ever draw our desires. The greater vision, if we were only wise enough to bring our lives habitually under its influence, would at once dim and ennoble all the near future.

Let us then, dear friends, not desecrate that wondrous faculty of looking before as well as after which God has given to us, by wasting it upon the nothings of this world, but heave it higher, and anchor it more firmly in the very Throne of God Himself. And for us let one solemn, blessed thought more and more fill with its substance and its light the else dim and questionable and insufficient future, and walk evermore as seeing Him who is invisible, and as hasting unto the coming of the day of the Lord.

II. Then, secondly, note the definite aim which this clear hope should impress upon life.

If you knew that you were going to emigrate soon, and spend all your life on the other side of the world, in circumstances the outlines of which you knew, you would be a fool if you did not set yourself to get ready for them. The more clearly we see and the more deeply we feel that future hope, which is disclosed for us in the words of my text, the more it will prescribe a dominant purpose which will give unity, strength, buoyancy, and blessedness to any life. 'Seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent.' For what? 'That ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless.'

Now mark the details of the aim which this great hope impresses upon life, as they are stated in the words of my text. Every word is weighty here. 'That ye may be *found*.' That implies, if not search, at least investigation. It suggests the idea of the discovery of the true condition, character, or standing of a man which may have been hidden or partially obscured before—and now, at last, is brought out clearly. With the same suggestion of investigation and discovery, the same phrase is employed in other places; as, for instance, when the Apostle Paul speaks about being 'found naked,' or as when he speaks about being 'found in Him, not having mine own righteousness.' So, then, there is some process of examination or investigation, resulting in the discovery, possibly for the first time, of what a man really is.

Then note, 'Found *in Him*,' or as the Revised Version reads it, 'in His sight.' Then Christ is the Investigator, and it is before 'those pure eyes and perfect judgment' that they have to pass, who shall be admitted into the new heavens and the new earth, 'wherein dwelleth righteousness.'

Then mark what is the character which, discovered on investigation by Jesus Christ, admits there: 'without spot and blameless.' There must be the entire absence of every blemish, stain, or speck of impurity. The purer the white the more conspicuous the black. Soot is never so foul as when it lies on driven snow. They who enter here must have nothing in them akin to evil. 'Blameless' is the consequence of 'spotless.' That which in itself is pure attracts no censure, whether from the Judge or from the assessors and onlookers in His court.

But, further, these two words, in almost the same identical form—one of them absolutely the same, and the

other almost so—are found in Peter's other letter as a description of Jesus Christ Himself. He was a Lamb 'without blemish and without spot.' And thus the character that qualifies for the new heavens is the copy of us in Jesus Christ.

Still further, only those who thus have attained to the condition of absolute, speckless purity and conformity to Jesus Christ will meet His searching eye in calm tranquillity and be 'found of Him *in peace*.'

The steward brings his books to his master. If he knows that there has been trickery with the figures and embezzlement, how the wretch shakes in his shoes, though he may stand apparently calm, as the master's keen eye goes down the columns! If he knows that it is all right, how calmly he waits the master's signature at the end, to pass the account! The soldiers come back with victory on their helmets, and are glad to look their captain in the face. But if they come back beaten, they shrink aside and hide their shame. If we are to meet Jesus Christ with quiet hearts, and we certainly shall meet Him, we must meet Him 'without spot and blameless.' The discovery, then, of what men truly are will be like the draining of the bed of a lake. Ah, what ugly slimy things there are down in the bottom! What squalor and filth flung in from the houses, and covered over many a day by the waters! All that surface work will be drained off from the hearts of men. Shall we show slime and filth, or shall we show lovely corals and silver sand without a taint or a speck?

These are the details of the life's aim of a Christian man. And they may all be gathered up into one. The end which we should seek as sovereign and high above all others is the conformity of our character to Jesus

Christ our Lord. Never mind about anything else; let us leave all in God's hands. He will do better for us than we can do for ourselves. Let us trust Him for the contingent future; and let us set ourselves to secure this, that, whether joy or sorrow, whether wealth or poverty, whether success or failure, whether sweet companionship or solitary tears be our lot for the rest of our lives, we may grow in grace, and in the knowledge and likeness of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Make that your aim, and freshness, buoyancy, enthusiasm, the ennobling of everything in this world, and the bending of all to be contributory of it, will gladden your days. Make anything else your aim, and you fail of your highest purpose, and your life, however successful, will be dreary and disappointed, and its end will be shame.

III. Lastly, notice the earnest diligence with which that aim should be pursued, in the light of that hope.

Peter is fond of using the word which is here translated 'be diligent.' Hard work, honest effort, continuous and persevering, is His simple recipe for all nobleness. You will find He employs it, for instance, at least three times in this letter, in such connections as, 'Besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue,' and so on through the whole glorious series; and again, 'Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure.' So, then, there is no mystery about the way of securing the aim; work towards it, and you will get it.

Now, of course, there are a great many other considerations to be brought in in reference to the Christian man's means of becoming Christlike. We should have to speak of the gifts of a Divine Spirit, of the dependence upon God for it, and the like; but for the present purpose

we may confine ourselves to Peter's own prescription, 'be diligent,' and that will secure it. But then the word itself opens out into further meanings than that. It not only implies diligence: there may be diligence of a very mechanical and ineffective sort. The word also includes in its meaning earnestness, and it very frequently includes that which is the ordinary consequence of earnestness—viz., haste and economy of time.

So I venture, in closing, just to throw my remarks into three simple exhortations. Be in earnest in cultivating a Christlike character. Half-and-half Christians, like a great many of us, are of no use either to God or to men or to themselves. Dawdling and languid, braced up and informed by no earnestness of purpose, and never having had enthusiasm enough to set themselves fairly alight, they do no good and they come to nothing. 'I would thou wert cold or hot.' One thing sorely wanted in the average Christianity of this day is that professing Christians should give the motives which their faith supplies for earnest consecration due weight and power. Nothing else will succeed. You will never grow like Christ unless you are in earnest about it any more than you could pierce a tunnel through the Alps with a straw. It needs an iron bar tipped with diamond to do it. Unless your whole being is engaged in the task, and you gather your whole self together into a point, and drive the point with all your force, you will never get through the rock barrier that rises between you and the fair lands beyond. Be in earnest, or give it up altogether.

Then another thing I would venture to say is, Make it your *business* to cultivate a character like that of Jesus Christ. If you would go to the work of growing a Christlike spirit one-hundredth part as systematically as you

will go to your business to-morrow, and stick at it, there would be a very different condition of things in most of our hearts. No man becomes noble and good and like the dear Lord 'by a jump,' without making a systematic and conscious effort towards it.

I would say, lastly, Make haste about cultivating a Christlike character. The harvest is great, the toil is heavy, the sun is drawing to the west, the evening shadows are very long with some of us, the reckoning is at hand, and the Master waits to count your sheaves. There is no time to lose, brother; set about it as you have never done before, and say, 'This one thing I do.'

And so let us not fill our minds with vain hopes which, whether they be fulfilled or not, will not satisfy us, but lift our eyes to and stay our anticipations on those glories beyond, as real as God is real, and as certain as His word is true. Let these hopes concentrate and define for us the aims of our life; and let the aims, clearly accepted and recognised, be pursued with earnestness, with 'diligence,' with haste, with the enthusiasm of which they, and they only, are worthy. Let us listen to our Master, 'I must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day; the night cometh.' And let us listen to the words of the servant, which reverse the metaphor, and teach the same lesson in a trumpet call which anticipates the dawn and rouses the sleeping soldiers: 'The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light'

GROWTH

'But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.
. . .'-2 PETER iii. 18.

THESE are the last words of an old man, written down as his legacy to us. He was himself a striking example of his own precept. It would be an interesting study to examine these two letters of the Apostle Peter, in order to construct from them a picture of what he became, and to contrast it with his own earlier self when full of self-confidence, rashness, and instability. It took a lifetime for Simon, the son of Jonas, to grow into Peter; but it was done. And the very faults of the character became strength. What he had proved possible in his own case he commands and commends to us, and from the height to which he has reached, he looks upwards to the infinite ascent which he knows he will attain when he puts off this tabernacle; and then downwards to his brethren, bidding them, too, climb and aspire. His last word is like that of the great Roman Catholic apostle to the East Indies: 'Forward!' He is like some trumpeter on the battlefield who spends his last breath in sounding an advance. Immortal hope animates his dying injunction: 'Grow! grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour.'

So I think we may take these words, dear friends, as the starting-point for some very plain remarks about what I am afraid is a neglected duty, the duty of growth in Christian character.

I. I begin, first, with a word or two about the direction which Christian growth ought to take.

Now those of you who use the Revised Version will see in it a very slight, but very valuable alteration. It reads there: 'Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour.' The effect of that alteration being to bring out more clearly that whilst the direction of the growth is twofold, the process is one. And to bring out more clearly, also, that both the grace and the knowledge have connection with Jesus Christ.

He is the Giver and the Author of the grace. He is the Object of the knowledge. The one is more moral and spiritual; the other, if we may so say, more intellectual; but both are realised by one act of progress, and both inhere in, and refer to, and are occupied with, and are derived from, Jesus Christ Himself.

Let us look a little more closely at this double direction, this bifurcation, as it were, of Christian growth. The tree, like some of our forest trees, in its normal progress, diverges into two main branches at a short distance upwards from the root.

First, we have growth in the 'grace' of Christ. Grace, of course, means, first, the undeserved love and favour which God in Jesus Christ bears to us sinful and inferior creatures; and then it means the consequence of that love and favour in the manifold spiritual endowments which in us become 'graces,' beauties, and excellences of Christian character. So then, if you are a Christian, you ought to be continually realising a deeper and more blessed consciousness of Christ's love and favour as yours. You ought to be, if I may so say, nestling every day nearer and nearer to His heart, and getting more and more sure, and more and more happily sure, of more and more of His mercy and love to you.

And if you are a Christian you ought not only thus to

be realising daily, with increasing certitude and power, the fact of His love, but you ought to be drinking in and deriving more and more every day of the consequences of that love, of the spiritual gifts of which His hands are full. There is open for each of us in Him an inexhaustible store of abundance. And if our Christian life is real and vigorous there ought to be in us a daily increasing capacity, and therefore a daily increasing possession of the gifts of His grace. There ought to be, in other words, also a daily progressive transformation into His likeness. It is 'the grace of our Lord Jesus,' not only in the sense that He is the Author and the Bestower of it to each of us, but also in the sense that He Himself possesses and exemplifies it. So that there is nothing mystical and remote from the experience of daily life in this exhortation: 'Grow in grace'; and it is not growth in some occult theological virtue, or transcendent experience, but a very plain, practical thing, a daily transformation, with growing completeness and precision of resemblance, into the likeness of Jesus Christ; the grace that was in Him being transferred to me, and my character being growingly irradiated and refined, softened and ennobled by the reflection of the lustre of His.

This it is to 'grow into the grace of our Lord and Saviour'; a deeper consciousness of His love creeping round the roots of my heart every day, and fuller possession of His gifts placed in my opening hand every day; and a continual approximation to the beauty of His likeness, which never halts nor ceases.

'Grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour.' The knowledge of a person is not the same as the knowledge of a creed or of a thought or of a book. We are to grow

in the knowledge of Christ, which includes but is more than the intellectual apprehension of the truths concerning Him. He might turn the injunction into—'Increase your acquaintance with your Saviour.' Many Christians never get to be any more intimate with Him than they were when they were first introduced to Him. They are on a kind of bowing acquaintance with their Master, and have little more than that. We sometimes begin an acquaintance which we think promises to ripen into a friendship, but are disappointed. Circumstances or some want of congeniality which is discovered prevent its growth. So with not a few professing Christians. They have got no nearer Jesus Christ than when they first knew Him. Their friendship has not grown. It has never reached the stage where all restraints are laid aside and there is perfect confidence. 'Grow in the knowledge of your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.' Get more and more intimate with Him, nearer to Him, and franker and more cordial with Him day by day.

But there is another side to the injunction besides that. We are to grow in the grasp, the intellectual grasp and realisation of the truths which lie wrapped up and enfolded in Him. The first truths that a man learns when he becomes a Christian are the most important. The lesson that the little child learns contains the Omega as well as the Alpha of all truth. There is no word in all the gospel that is an advance on that initial word, the faith of which saves the most ignorant who trusts to it. We begin with the end, if I may say so, and the highest truth is the first truth that we learn. But the aspect which that truth bears to the man when, first of all, it dawns upon him, and he sees in it the end of his fears, the cleansing of his heart, the pardoning of his sins, his

acceptance with God, is a very different thing from the aspect that it ought to wear to him, after, say forty years of pondering, of growing up to it, after years of experience have taught him. Life is the best commentary upon the truths of the gospel, and the experience teaches their depths and their power, their far-reaching applications and harmonies. So our growth in the knowledge of Jesus Christ is not a growing away from the earliest lessons, or a leaving them behind, but a growing up to and into them. So as to learn more fully and clearly all their infinite contents of grace and truth. The treasure put into our hands at first is discovered in its true preciousness as life and trial test its metal and its inexhaustibleness. The child's lesson is the man's lesson. All our Christian progress in knowledge consists in bringing to light the deep meaning, the far-reaching consequences of the fact of Christ's incarnation, death, and glory. 'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' The same truth which shone at first a star in a far-off sky, through a sinful man's night of fear and agony, grows in brilliance as we draw nearer to it, until at last it blazes, the central Sun of the Universe, the hearth for all vital warmth, the fountain of all guiding light, the centre of all energy. Christ in His manhood, in His divinity, Christ in His cross, resurrection, and glory, is the object of all knowledge, and we grow in the knowledge of Him by penetrating more deeply into the truths which we have long ago learned, as well as by following them as they lead us into new fields, and disclose unsuspected issues in creed and practice.

That growth will not be one-sided; for grace and knowl-

as well as this of growth, with all its sweet suggestions of continuous, effortless, spontaneous advance.

The Christian progress is not only growth, it is warfare. The Christian progress is not only growth, it is a race. The Christian progress is not only growth, it is mortifying the old man. The Christian progress is not only growth, it is putting off the old man with his deeds and putting on the new! 'First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear,' was never meant for a complete account of how the Christian life is perfected.

We are bidden to grow, and that command points to hindrances and resistance, to the need for effort and the governing action of our own wills.

The command is one sorely needed in the present state of our average Christianity. Our churches are full of monsters, specimens of arrested growth, dwarfs, who have scarcely grown since they were babes, infants all their lives. I come to you with a very plain question: Have you any more of Christ's beauty in your characters, any more of His grace in your hearts, any more of His truth in your minds than you had a year ago, ten years ago, or at that far-off period when some of you grey-headed men first professed to be Christians? Have you experienced so many things in vain? Have the years taught you nothing? Ah, brethren! for how many of us is it true: 'When for the time ye ought to be teachers ye have need that one teach you which be the first principles of the oracles of God'? 'Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour.'

And we need the command because all about us there are hindrances. There is the hindrance of an abuse of the evangelical doctrine of conversion, and the idea that springs up in many hearts that if once a man has 'passed

from death unto life,' and has managed to get inside the door of the banqueting-hall, that is enough. And there are numbers of people in our Nonconformist communities especially, where that doctrine of conversion is most distinctly preached, whose growth is stopped by the abuse that they make of it in fancying if they have once exercised faith in Jesus Christ they may safely and sinlessly stand still. 'Conversion' is turning round. What do we turn round for? Surely, in order that we may travel on in the new direction, not that we may stay where we are. There is also the hindrance of mere indolence, and there is the hindrance arising from absorption in the world and its concerns.

If all your strength is going thither, there is none left to grow with. Many professing Christians take such deep draughts of the intoxicating cup of this world's pleasures that it stunts their growth. People sometimes give children gin in order to keep them from growing. Some of you do that for your Christian character by the deep draughts that you take of the Circean cup of this world's pleasures and cares.

And not unfrequently, some one favourite evil, some lust or passion, or weakness, or desire, which you have not the strength to cast out, will kill all aspirations and destroy all possibilities of growth; and will be like an iron band round a little sapling, which will confine it and utterly prevent all expansion. Is that the case with any of us? We all need—and I pray you suffer—the word of exhortation.

III. Now, again, consider the method of growth.

There are two things essential to the growth of animal life. One is food, the other is exercise; and your Christian character will grow by no other means.

Now as to the first. The true means by which we shall grow in Christian grace is by holding continual intercourse and communion with Jesus Christ. It is from Him that all come. He is the Fountain of Life; He gives the life, He nourishes the life, He increases the life. And whilst I have been saying, in an earlier part of this discourse, that we are not to expect an effortless growth, I must here say that we shall very much mistake what Christian progress requires if we suppose that the effort is most profitably directed to the cultivation of specific and single acts of goodness and purity. Our efforts are best when directed to keeping ourselves in union with our Lord. The heart united to Him will certainly be advancing in all things fair and lovely and of good report. Keep yourselves in touch with Christ; and Christ will make you grow. That is to say, occupy heart and mind with Him, let your thoughts go to Him. Do you ever, from morning to night, on a week-day, think about your Master, about His truth, about the principles of His Gospel, about His great love to you? Keep your heart in union with Him, in the midst of the rush and hurry of your daily life. Are your desires turning to Him? Do they go out towards Him and feel after Him? It will take an effort to keep up the union with Him, but without the effort there will be no contact, and without the contact there will be no growth. As soon may you expect a plant, wrenched from the soil and shut out from the sunshine to grow, as expect any Christian progress in the hearts which are disjoined from Jesus Christ. But rooted in that soil, smiled upon by that sun, watered by the perpetual dew from His Heaven, we shall 'grow like the lily, and cast forth our roots like Lebanon. The secret of real Christian progress and the direction in

which the effort of Christian progress can most profitably and effectually be made, is simply in keeping close to our Lord and Master. He is the food of the Spirit. 'I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.'

Communion with Christ includes prayer. Desire to grow will help our growth. We tend to become what we long to be. Desire which impels to effort will not be in vain if it likewise impels to prayer. We may have the answer to our petition for growth in set ways; we may be but partially conscious of the answer, nor know that our faces shine when we go among men. But certainly if we pray for what is in such accordance with His will as 'growth in grace' is, we shall have the petition that we desire. That longing to know Him better and to possess more of His grace, like the tendrils of some climbing plant, will always find the support round which it may twine, and by which it may ascend.

The other condition of growth is exercise. Use the grace which you have, and it increases. Practice the truth which you know, and many things will become clearer. The blacksmith's muscles are strengthened by wielding the forge-hammer, but unused they waste. The child grows by exercise. To him that hath—truly possesses with that possession which only use secures—shall be given.

Communion with Christ, including prayer, and exercise are the means of growth.

IV. Lastly, observe the solemn alternative to growth.

It is not a question of either growing or not growing, and there an end; but if you will look at the context you will see that the exhortation of my text comes in in a very significant connection. 'Behold! beware, lest being

led away . . . ye fall from your own steadfastness.' 'But grow in grace.' That is to say, the only preventive of falling away from steadfastness is continual progress. The alternative of advance is retrogression. There is no standing still upon the inclined plane. If you are not going up, gravity begins to act, and down you go. There must either be continual advance or there will be certain decay and corruption. As soon as growth ceases in this physiology *disintegration* commences. Just as the graces exercised are strengthened, so the graces unexercised decay. The slothful servant wraps his talent in a napkin, and buries it in the ground. He may try to persuade his Master and himself with 'There Thou hast that is Thine'; but He will not take up what you buried. Rust and verdigris will have done their work upon the coin; the inscription will be obliterated and the image will be marred. You cannot bury your Christian grace in indolence without diminishing it. It will be like a bit of ice wrapped in a cloth and left in the sun, it will all have gone into water when you come to take it out. And the truth that you do *not* live by, whose relations and large harmonies and controlling power are not being increasingly realised in your lives; that truth is becoming less and less real, more and more shadowy, and ghostlike to you. Truth which is not growing is becoming fossilised. 'The things most surely believed' are often the things which have least power. Unquestioned truth too often lies 'bedridden in the dormitory of the soul side by side with exploded error.' The sure way to reduce your knowledge of Jesus Christ to that inert condition is to neglect increasing it and applying it to your daily life. There are men, in all churches, and there are some whole communions whose creeds are the most orthodox, and also

utterly useless, and as near as possible nonentities, simply because the creed is accepted and shelved. If your belief is to be of any use to you, or to be held by you in the face of temptations to abandon it, you must keep it fresh, and oxygenated, so to say, by continual fresh apprehension of it and closer application of it to conduct. As soon as the stream stands, it stagnates; and the very manna from God will breed worms and stink. And Christian truth unpractised by those who hold it, corrupts itself and corrupts them.

So Peter tells us that the alternative is growth or apostasy. This decay may be most real and unsuspected. There are many, many professing Christians all ignorant that, like the Jewish giant of old, their strength is gone from them, and the Spirit of God departed. My brother, I beseech you, rouse yourself from your contented slothfulness. Do not be satisfied with merely having come within the Temple. Count nothing as won whilst anything remains to be won. There is a whole ocean of boundless grace and truth rolling shoreless there before you. Do not content yourselves with picking up a few shells on the beach, but launch out into the deep, and learn to know more and more of the grace and truth and beauty of your Saviour and your God.

But remember dead things do not grow. You cannot grow unless you are alive, and you are not alive unless you have Jesus Christ.

Have you given yourselves to Him? have you taken Him as yours? given yourselves to Him as His servants, subjects, soldiers? taken Him for yours as your Saviour, Sacrifice, Pattern, Inspirer, Friend? If you have, then you have life which will grow if you keep it in union with Him. Joined to Him, men are like a 'tree that is

planted by the rivers of water,' which spreads its foliage and bears its fruit, and year after year flings a wider shadow upon the grass, and lifts a sturdier bole to the heavens. Separated from Him they are like the chaff, which has neither root nor life, and which cannot grow.

Which, my friend, are you?

I. JOHN

THE MESSAGE AND ITS PRACTICAL RESULTS

'This then is the message which we have heard of Him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. 6. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: 7. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin. 8. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.'

'My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: 2. And He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. 3. And hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. 4. He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in Him. 6. He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked.'—1 JOHN i. 5-ii. 6.

JOHN is the mystic among the New Testament writers. He dwells much on the immediate union of the soul with God, and he has little to say about institutions and rites. His method is not to argue, but to utter deep, simple propositions which convince by their own light. But he is also intensely eager for plain, practical morality, and in that respect sets the example which, unfortunately, too many of the more mystical types of Christian teaching have failed to follow. To him the outcome and test of all deep hidden union with God is righteousness in life.

The blending of these two elements, which is the very keynote of this letter, is wonderfully set forth in this passage. They would require much more space than we command for their treatment, for every clause is weighty as gold. We can but skim the surface, and try to bring out the salient points.

I. We have, first, a wonderful gathering up of the whole gospel message into one utterance as to the essential nature of God. Light is in all languages the symbol of knowledge, of joy, of purity. It is the source of life. Its very nature is to ray itself out into and conquer darkness. Its splendor dazzles every eye; all things rejoice in its beams. Darkness is the type of ignorance, of sorrow, of sin. But, whilst the symbol is thus rich in manifold revelations, probably purity and self-communication are the predominating ideas here.

John has been honoured to give the world the three great revelations that God is spirit, is light, is love. And this profound saying in some sense includes both the others, inasmuch as light, which to the popular mind is most widely apart from matter, may well stand for the emblem of spirit, and, since to radiate is its inseparable quality, does represent in symbol the delight in imparting Himself, which is the very heart of the declaration that God is love. If, then, we grasp these two thoughts of absolute purity and of self-impartation as the very nature and property of God, John tells us that we grasp the kernel of the Gospel.

And he thinks that men never will grasp them certainly unless a 'message' from God, a definite revelation in historical fact, certifies them. We may hope or doubt, or desire, but we cannot be sure that God is light unless he tells us so by unmistakable act. John knew what act that was—the sending of His only-begotten Son. To the positive statement John, in his usual manner, appends an emphatic negative one: 'Darkness is not in him, no, not in any way.' He is light, all light, only light.

II. With characteristic moral earnestness, John passes at once to the practical effects which the message is

meant to have. We are not told what God is simply that we may know, but that, knowing, we may do and be. If He is light, two things will follow in those who are in union with Him—they will walk in light, and they will in His light see their own evil. John deals with these two consequences in verses 6-10—the former in verses 6 and 7; the latter in verses 8-10. The parallelism in the construction of these two sets of verses is striking:

VERSES 6, 7.

If we say

that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness,

we lie, and do not the truth.

But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light,

we have fellowship one with another.

and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us from all sin.

VERSES 8, 9.

If we say

that we have no sin

we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

If we confess our sins,

He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins,

and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

As to the former of these two paragraphs, the underlying thought is that fellowship with God necessarily involves moral likeness to Him. Worship is always aspiration after, and conformity to, the character of the god worshipped, and there can be no true communion with a God who is light unless the worshipper walks in light. In plain language, all high-flying pretensions to communion with God must verify themselves by practical righteousness. That cuts deep into an emotional religion, which has much to say about raptures and the like, but produces little purifying effect on the humble details of daily life.

There are always professing Christians who talk of their blessed experiences, and woefully fail in prosaic virtues. It is a pity that a man should hold his head so high that he does not look to keep his feet out of the mud. Such a profession is for the most part tainted with more or less conscious falsehood, and is always a proof that the truth—the sum of God's revelation—is not operative in the man; that he is not turning his belief into act, as all belief should be. On the other hand, the true relation resulting from the message is that we should walk in the light, as He is in it.

Verse 10 seems to be simply a reiteration of the preceding idea, with some intensifying, and that chiefly in the description of the true character of the denial of sin. To make God a liar is worse than to lie or to deceive ourselves; and all ignoring of sin does that, because not only has God declared its universality by the words of revelation, but all His dealings with men are based upon the fact that they are all sinners, and we fly in the face of all His words and works if we deny that which we ourselves are. Therefore the Apostle further varies his expression, and says 'His word' instead of 'the truth,' thus bringing into prominence the thought that 'the truth' is made accessible to us because God has spoken.

III. Chapter ii. 1-6 is in structure analogous to the preceding section. As there, so here, the 'message' is summed up in one great fact,—Christ's work as advocate for believers and as propitiation for the world. As there, so here, two practical consequences follow, which are drawn out on corresponding lines. Observe the repetition, in verses 3 and 5 *b*, of 'hereby know we,' and in verses 4 and 6 of 'He that saith.'

Note, too, the reappearance of 'is a liar' and of 'the

truth is not in him' in verse 4. The drift of the section may be briefly put as follows. John's heart melts as he thinks of the possibilities of holiness open to believers, and of the sad actualities of their imperfect lives, and he addresses them by the tender name, 'my little children.' The impelling and guiding motive of his letter is that they may not sin. Practical righteousness is the end of revelation, and its complete attainment should be the aim of every believer.

But the sad experience of 'saints' is that they are not yet wholly delivered from its power. Therefore 'the message' is not only 'God is light without blending of darkness,' but, 'we Christians have an Advocate with the Father.' Jesus is to-day carrying on His mighty work of prevalent intercession for all His servants, and that intercession secures forgiveness for their inconsistencies and lapses, because it rests upon Christ's finished work of 'propitiation,' which is for the whole world, even though it actually avails only for believers.

Such being the power of Christ's work in its twofold aspect of propitiation and of intercession, the same practical issues as in the preceding section were shown to flow from the revealed nature of God are here, in somewhat different form, linked with that work. First, keeping his commandments (which is equivalent to 'walking in the light') is the test to ourselves, as well as to others, of our really knowing Him with a knowledge which is not mere head work, but the acquaintance of sympathy and friendship, or, in the words of the previous paragraph, having fellowship with Him.

Clearly, the scope of this section requires that 'His commandments' should here mean Christ's, not the Father's. All professions of knowing Jesus which are

not verified by obedience to Him are false. If we do keep His word—not merely the individual ‘commandments,’ but the word as one great whole—our love to God reaches its perfection, for it is no mere emotion of the heart, but the force which is to mould and actuate all our acts.

Verse 5 *b* should be separated from the preceding words, for it is really the beginning of the second issue from the work of Christ, and is parallel with ‘hereby know we,’ etc., in verse 3. Observe the progress in thought from the assurance that we *know* (ver. 3) to the assurance that we *are in* Him. The Christian’s relation to Jesus is not only that of acquaintance, however intimate, loving, and transforming, but that of actual dwelling in Him. That great truth shines on every page of the New Testament, and is not to be weakened down into metaphor or rhetoric. It is the very heart of the Christian life, and the test that we have attained to it, and that not merely as an occasional, but as a permanent, condition (note that ‘*are in* Him’ is strengthened to ‘*abideth in* Him’) is that our outward life, in its manifold activities, shall be conformed to the pattern of all holiness in the life of Jesus. To walk as He walked is to walk in the light. Profession is nothing, conduct is everything, and we shall only be clear of sin in the measure in which we have Him who is the light of men for the very life of our lives.

WALKING IN THE LIGHT

'If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.'—1 JOHN i. 7.

JOHN was the Apostle of love, but he was also a 'son of thunder.' His intense moral earnestness and his very love made him hate evil, and sternly condemn it; and his words flash and roll as no other words in Scripture, except the words of the Lord of love. In the immediate context he has been laying down what is to him the very heart of his message, that 'God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.' There are spots in the sun, great tracts of blackness on its radiant disc; but in God is unmingled, perfect purity. That being so, it is clear that no man can be in sympathy or hold communion with Him, unless he, too, in his measure, is light.

So, with fiery indignation, John turns to the people, of whom there were some, even in the primitive Church, who made claims to a lofty spirituality and communion with God, and all the while were manifestly living in the darkness of sin. He will not mince matters with them. He roundly says that they are lying, and the worst sort of lie—an acted lie: 'They do not the truth.' Then, with a quick turn, he opposes to these pretenders the men who really are in fellowship with God, and in my text lays down the principle that walking in the light is essential to fellowship with God. Only, in his usual fashion, he turns the antithesis into a somewhat different form, so as to suggest another aspect of the truth, and instead of saying, as we might expect for the verbal accuracy of the contrast, 'If we walk in the light, as He is in the

light, we have fellowship with God,' he says, 'we have fellowship one with another.' Then he adds a still further result of that walk, 'the blood of Jesus cleanses from all sin.'

Now there are three things: walking in the light, which is the only Christian walk; the companions of those who walk in the light; and the progressive cleansing which is given.

I. Note this 'Walking in the light,' which is the only Christian walk.

In all languages, light is the natural symbol for three things: knowledge, joy, purity. The one ray is broken into its three constituent parts. But just as there are some surfaces which are sensitive to the violet rays, say, of the spectrum, and not to the others, so John's intense moral earnestness makes him mainly sensitive to the symbolism which makes light the expression, not so much of knowledge or of joy, as of moral purity. And although that is not exclusively his use of the emblem, it is predominately so, and it is so here. To 'walk in the light' then, is, speaking generally, to have purity, righteousness, goodness, as the very element and atmosphere in which our progressive and changeful life is carried on.

Note, too, before I go further, that very significant antithesis: we 'walk'; He *is*—God *is* in the light essentially, changelessly, undisturbedly, eternally; and the light in which He is, His 'own calm home, His habitation from eternity,' is light which has flowed out from Himself as a halo round the midnight moon. It is all one in substance to say God is in light, or, as the Psalmist has it, 'He covered Himself with light as with a garment,' and to say, 'God is light.'

But, side by side with that changeless abiding in the perfect purity, which is inaccessible, the Apostle ventures to put, not in contrast only, but in parallel (*as He is*), our changing, effortful, active, progressive life in the light (*God is*); we walk.

So, then, the essential of a Christian character is that the light of purity and moral goodness shall be as the very orb, in the midst of which it stands and advances. That implies effort, and it implies activity, and it implies progress. And we are only Christians in the measure in which the conscious activities of our daily lives, and the deepest energies of our inward being, are bathed and saturated with this love of, and effort after, righteousness. It is vain, says John, to talk about fellowship with God, unless the fellowship is rooted in sympathy with Him in that which is the very heart of His Being, the perfect light of perfect holiness. Test your Christianity by that.

Then, still further, there is implied in this great requirement of walking in the light, not only activity and effort, and progress in purity, but also that the whole of the life shall be brought into relation with, and shall be moulded after, the pattern of the God in whom we profess to believe. Religion, in its deepest meaning, is the aspiration after likeness to the god. You see it in heathenism. Men make their gods after their own image, and then the god makes the worshippers after his image. Mars is the god of the soldier, and Venus goddess of the profligate, and Apollo god of the musical and the wise, etc., and in Christianity the deepest thing in it is aspiration and effort after likeness to God. Love is imitation; admiration, especially when it is raised to the highest degree and becomes adoration, is imitation. And the

man that lies before God, like a mirror in the sunshine, receives on the still surface of his soul—but not, like the mirror, on the surface only, but down into its deepest depths—the reflected image of Him on Whom he gazes. ‘We all with unveiled face, mirroring glory, are changed into the same image.’ So to walk in the light is only possible when we are drawn into it, and our feeble feet made fit to tread upon the radiant glory, by the thought that He is in the light. To imitate Him is to be righteous. So do not let us forget that a correct creed, and devout emotions, ay! and a morality which has no connection with Him, are all imperfect, and that the end of all our religion, our orthodox creed and our sweet emotions and inward feelings of acceptance and favour and fellowship, are meant to converge on, and to produce this—a life and a character which lives and moves and has its being in a great orb of light and purity.

But another thing is included in this grand metaphor of my text. Not only does it enjoin upon us effort and activity and progress in the light and the linking of all our purity with God, but also, it bids us shroud no part of our conduct or our character either from ourselves or from Him. Bring it all out into the light. And although with a penitent heart, and a face suffused with blushes, we have sometimes to say, ‘See, Father, what I have done!’ it is far better that the revealing light should shine down upon us, and like the sunshine on wet linen, melt away the foulness which it touches, than that we should huddle the ugly thing up in a corner, to be one day revealed and transfixed by the flash of the light turned into lightning. ‘He that doeth the truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest.’

II. So much, then, for my first point; the second is: The companions of the men that walk in the light.

I have already pointed out that the accurate, perhaps pedantically accurate, form of the antithesis would have been: 'If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with God.' But John says, first, 'we have fellowship one with another.' Underlying that, as I shall have to say in a moment, there is the other thought: 'We have fellowship with God.' But he deals with the other side of the truth first. That just comes to this, that the only cement that perfectly knits men to each other is their common possession of that light, and the consequent fellowship with God. There are plenty of other bonds that draw us to one another; but these, if they are not strengthened by this deepest of all bonds, the affinity of souls, that are moving together in the realm of light and purity, are precarious; and apt to snap. Sin separates men quite as much as it separates each man from God. It is the wedge driven into the tree that rends it apart. Human society with its various bonds is like the iron hoop that may be put around the barrel staves, giving them a quasi-unity. The one thing that builds men together into a whole is that each shall be, as it were, embedded in the rock which is the foundation, and the building will rise into a holy temple in the Lord. Sin separates; as the prophet confessed, 'All we like sheep have gone astray, every one to *his own way*,' and the flock is broken up into a multitude of scattered sheep. Social enthusiasts may learn the lesson that the only way by which brotherhood among men can become anything else than a name, and probably end, as it did in the great French Revolution, in 'brothers' making hecatombs of their brethren under the guillotine, is that it shall be the

corollary from the Fatherhood of God. If we walk in the light, not otherwise, we have 'fellowship one with another.'

Then, still further, in this fellowship one with another, John presupposes the fellowship with God for each, which makes the possibility and the certainty of all being drawn into one family. He does not think it necessary to state, what is so plain and obvious, viz., that unless we are in sympathy with God, in our aspiration and effort after the light which is His home and ours, we have no real communion with Him. I said that sin separated man from man, and disrupted all the sweet bonds of amity, so that if men come into contact, being themselves in the darkness, they come into collision rather than into communion. A company of travellers in the night are isolated individuals. When the sun rises on their paths they are a company again. And in like manner, sin separates us from God, and if our hearts are turned towards, and denizens of, the darkness of impurity, then we have no communion with Him. He cannot come to us if we love the darkness. He

'Can but listen at the gate,
And hear the household jar within.'

The tide of the Atlantic feels along the base of iron-bound cliffs on our western shores, and there is not a crevice into which it can come. So God moves about us, but is without us, so long as we walk in darkness. So let us remember that no union with Him is possible, except there be this common dwelling in the light. Two grains of quicksilver laid upon a polished surface will never unite if their surfaces be dusted over with minute impurities, or if the surface of one of them be. Clean

away the motes, and they will coalesce and be one. A film of sin separates men from God. And if the film be removed the man dwells in God, and God in him.

III. That brings me to my last point: The progressive cleansing of those who dwell in the light.

'The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin.' Now if you will notice the whole context, and eminently the words a couple of verses after my text, you will see that the cleansing here meant is not the cleansing of forgiveness, but the cleansing of purifying. For the two things are articulately distinguished in the ninth verse: 'He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' So, to use theological terms, it is not justification, but sanctification that is meant here.

Then there is another thing to be noticed, and that is that when the Apostle speaks here about the blood of Christ, he is not thinking of that blood as shed on the Cross, the atoning sacrifice, but of that blood as transfused into the veins, the source there of our new life. The Old Testament says that 'the blood is the life.' Never mind about the statement being scientifically correct; it conveys the idea of the time, which underlies a great deal of Old and New Testament teaching. And when John says the blood of Jesus cleanses from 'all sin,' he says just the same thing as his brother Paul said, 'the law of the spirit of life in Jesus Christ makes me free from the law of sin and death.' That is to say, a growing cleansing from the dominion and the power of sin is granted to us, if we have the life of Jesus Christ breathed into our lives. The metaphor is a very strong one. They tell us—I know nothing about the truth of it—that sometimes it has been possible to revive a mori-

bund man by transfusing into his veins blood from another. That is a picture of the only way by which you and I can become free from the tyranny that dominates us. We must have the life of Christ as the animating principle of our lives, the spirit of Jesus emancipating us from the power of sin and death.

So you see, there are two aspects of Christ's great work set before us under that one metaphor of the blood in its two-fold form, first, as shed for us sinners on the Cross; second, as poured into our veins day by day. That works progressive cleansing. It covers the whole ground of all possible iniquity. Pardon is much, purifying is more. The sacrifice on the Cross is the basis of everything, but that sacrifice does not exhaust what Christ does for us. He died for our sins, and lives for our sanctifying. He died for us, He lives in us. Because He died, we are forgiven; because He lives, we are made pure. Only remember John's 'if.' The 'blood of Jesus will progressively cleanse us until it has cleansed us from *all* sin, on condition that we 'walk in the light,' not otherwise. If the main direction of our lives is towards the light; if we seek, by aspiration and by effort, and by deliberate choice, to live in holiness, then, and not else, will the power of the life of Jesus Christ deliver us from the power of sin and death.

Now, my text presupposes that the people to whom it is addressed, and whom it concerns, have already passed from darkness into light, if not wholly, yet in germ. But for those who have not so passed, there is something to be said before my text. And John says it immediately; here it is, 'If any man sin we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for our sins only, but for

the whole world.' So we have to begin with the blood shed for us, the means of our pardon, and then we have the advance of the blood sprinkled on us, the means of our cleansing. If by humble faith we take the dying Lord for our Saviour, and the channel of our forgiveness, we shall have the pardon of our sins. If we listen to the voice that says, 'Ye were sometime darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord. Walk as children of the light,' we shall have fellowship with the living Lord, and daily know more and more of the power of His cleansing blood, making us 'meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.'

THE COMMANDMENT, OLD YET NEW

'I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. . . . Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you.'—1 JOHN ii. 7, 8.

THE simplest words may carry the deepest thoughts. Perhaps angels and little children speak very much alike. This letter, like all of John's writing, is pellucid in speech, profound in thought, clear and deep, like the abysses of mid-ocean. His terms are such as a child can understand; his sentences short and inartificial: he does not reason, he declares; he has neither argument nor rhetoric, but he teaches us the deepest truths, and shows us that we get nearer the centre by insight than by logic.

Now the words that I have taken for my text are very characteristic of this Apostle's manner. He has a great, wide-reaching truth to proclaim, and he puts it in the simplest, most inartificial manner, laying side by side

two artless sentences, and stimulates us by the juxtaposition, leading us to feel after, and so to make our own, the large lessons that are in them. Let me, then, try to bring these out.

I. And the first one that strikes me is—‘the word’ is a commandment.’

Now, by ‘the word’ here the Apostle obviously means, since he speaks about it as that which these Asiatic Christians ‘heard from the beginning,’ the initial truth which was presented for their acceptance in the story of the life and death of Jesus Christ. That was ‘the word,’ and, says he, just because it was a history it is a commandment; just because it was the Revelation of God it is a law. God never tells us anything merely that we may be wise. The purpose of all divine speech, whether in His great works in nature, or in the voices of our own consciences, or in the syllables that we have to piece together from out of the complicated noises of the world’s history, or in this book, or in the Incarnate Word, where all the wandering syllables are gathered together into one word—the purpose of all that God says to men is primarily that they may know, but in order that, knowing they may do; and still more that they may be. And so inasmuch as every piece of religious knowledge has in it the capacity of directing conduct, all God’s word is a commandment.

And, if that is true in regard to other revelations and manifestations that he has made of Himself, it is especially true in regard to the summing-up of all in the Incarnate Word, and in His words, and in the word that tell us of His life and of His death. So whatever truths there may be, and there are many, which, of course, have only the remotest, if any, bearing upon life

and conduct, every bit of Christian truth has a direct grip upon a man's life, and brings with it a stringent obligation.

Now, the Revelation of God in Jesus Christ, 'the Word which ye heard from the beginning,' which, I suppose, would roughly correspond with what is told us in our four Gospels; the word which these Asiatic Christians heard at first, the good news that was brought to them in the midst of their gropings and peradventures, commanded, in the first place, absolute trust, the submission of the will as well as the assent of the understanding. But also it commanded imitation, for Jesus Christ was revealed to them, as He is revealed to us, as being the Incarnate realisation of the ideal of humanity; and what He is, the knowledge that He is that, binds us to try to be in our turn.

And more than that, brethren, the Cross of Christ is a commandment. For we miserably mutilate it, and sinfully as well as foolishly limit its application and its power, if we recognise it only—I was going to say mainly—as being the ground of our hope and of what we call our salvation, and do not recognise it as being the obligatory example of our lives, which we are bound to translate into our daily practice. Jesus Christ Himself has told us that in many a fashion, never more touchingly and wondrously than when in response to the request of a handful of Greeks to see Him, He answered with the word which not only declared what was obligatory upon Him, but what was obligatory upon us all, and for the want of which all the great endowments of the Greek mind at last rotted down into sensuousness, when He said, 'Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone, but if it die it bringeth forth much

fruit,' and then went on to say, 'he that loveth his life shall lose it.'

So, then, brethren, 'the word which ye heard at the beginning,' the story of Christ, His life and His death, is a stringent commandment. Now, this is one of the blessings of Christianity, that all which was hard and hopeless, ministering to despair sometimes, as well as stirring to fierce effort at others, in the conception of law or duty as it stands outside us, is changed into the tender word, 'if ye love Me, keep My commandments.' If any man serve Me, let him . . . 'follow Me.' It is a law; it is 'the law of liberty.' So you have not done all that is needful when you have accepted the teaching of Christ in the Scriptures and the teaching of the Scriptures concerning Christ. Nor have you done all that is needful when clasping Him, and clinging simply to His Cross, you recognise in it the means and the pledge of your acceptance with God, and the ground and anchor of all your hope. There is something more to be done. The Gospel is a commandment, and commandments require not only assent, not only trust, but practical obedience. The 'old commandment' is the 'word which ye heard from the beginning.'

II. The old Christ is perpetually new.

The Apostle goes on, in the last words of my text, to say, 'Which thing' (viz., this combination of the old and the new) 'is true in Him and in you.' 'True in Him'—that is to say, Christ, the old Christ that was declared to these Asiatic Christians as they were groping amidst the illusions of their heathenism, is perpetually becoming new as new circumstances emerge and new duties are called for, and new days come with new burdens, hopes, possibilities, or dangers. The

perpetual newness of the old Christ is what is taught here.

Suppose one of these men in Ephesus heard for the first time the story that away in Judea there had lived the manifestation of God in the flesh, and that He, in His wonderful love, had died for men, that they might be saved from the grip of their sins. And suppose that man barely able to see, had yet seen that much, and clutched at it. He was a Christian, but the Christ that he discerned when he first discerned Him through the mists, and the Christ that he had in his life and in his heart, after, say, twenty years of Christian living, are very different. The old Christ remained, but the old Christ was becoming new day by day, according to the new necessities and positions. And that is what will be our experience if we have any real Christianity in us. The old Christ that we trusted at first was able to do for us all that we asked Him to do, but we did not ask Him at first for half enough, and we did not learn at first a tithe of what was in Him. Suppose, for instance, some great ship comes alongside a raft with ship-wrecked sailors upon it, and in the darkness of the night transfers them to the security of its deck. They know how safe they are, they know what has saved them, but what do they know compared with what they will know before the voyage ends of all the reservoirs of power and stores of supplies that are in her? Christ comes to us in the darkness, and delivers us. We know Him for our Deliverer from the first moment, if we truly have grasped Him. But it will take summering and wintering with Him, through many a long day and year, before we can ever have a partially adequate apprehension of all that lies in Him.

And what will teach us the depths of Christ, and how does He become new to us? Well—by trusting Him, by following Him, and by the ministry of life. Some of us, I have no doubt, can look back upon past days when sorrow fell upon us, blighting and all but crushing; and then things that we had read a thousand times in the Bible, and thought we had believed, blazed up into a new meaning, and we felt as if we had never understood anything about them before. The Christ that is with us in the darkness, and whom we find able to turn even it, into light, at least into a solemn twilight not unvisited by hopes, that Christ is more to us than the Christ that we first of all learnt so little to know. And life's new circumstances, its emerging duties, are like the strokes of the spade which clears away the soil, and discloses the treasure in all its extent which we purchased when we bought that field. We buy the treasure at once, but it takes a long time to count it. The old Christ is perpetually the new Christ.

So, brethren, Christian progress consists not in getting away from the original facts, the elements of the Gospel, but it consists in penetrating more deeply into these, and feeling more of their power and their grasp. All Euclid is in the definitions and axioms and postulates at the beginning. All our books are the letters of the alphabet. And progress consists, not in advancing beyond, but in sinking into, that initial truth, 'God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.'

I might say a word here as to another phase of this perpetual newness of the old Christ—viz., in His adaptation to deal with all the complications and perplexities and problems of each successive age. It has taken the Church a long, long time to find out and to formulate

rightly or wrongly, what it has discovered in Jesus. The conclusions to be drawn from the simple Gospel truth, the presuppositions on which it rests, require all the efforts of all the Church through all the ages, and transcend them all. And I venture to say, though it may sound like unsupported dogma, that for this generation's questionings, social, moral, and political, the answer is to be found in Him. He, and He only, will interpret each generation to itself, and will meet its clamant needs. There is none other for the world to-day but the old Christ with the new aspect which the new conditions require.

Did it ever strike you how remarkable it is, and, as it seems to me, of how great worth as an argument for the truth of Christianity it is, that Jesus Christ comes to this, as to every generation, with the air of belonging to it? Think of the difference between the aspect which a Plato or a Socrates presents to the world to-day, and the aspect which that Lord presents. You do not need to strip anything off Him. He committed Himself to no statements which the progress of thought or knowledge has exploded. He stands before the world to-day fitting its needs as closely as He did those of the men of His own generation. The old Christ is the new Christ.

III. Lastly, in the Christian life the old commandment is perpetually new.

'Which thing is true . . . in you.' That is to say, 'the commandment which ye received at the beginning,' when ye received Christ as Saviour, has in itself a power of adapting itself to all new conditions as they may emerge, and will be felt increasingly to grow stringent, and increasingly to demand more entire conformity, and increasingly to sweep its circle round the whole of human

life. For this is the result of all obedience, that the conception of duty becomes more clear and more stringent. 'If any man will do His will' the reward shall be that he will see more and more the altitude of that will, the length and breadth and depth and height of the possible conformity of the human spirit to the will of God. And so as we advance in obedience we shall see unreached advances before us, and each new step of progress will declare more fully how much still remains to be accomplished. In us the 'old commandment' will become ever new.

And not only so, but perpetually with the increasing sweep and stringency of the obligation will be felt an increasing sense of our failure to fulfil it. Character is built up, for good or for evil, by slow degrees. Conscience is quickened by being listened to, and stifled by being neglected. A little speck of mud on a vestal virgin's robe, or on a swan's plumage, will be conspicuous while a splash twenty times the size will pass unnoticed on the rags of some travel-stained wayfarer. The purer we become, the more we shall know ourselves to be impure.

Thus, my brother, there opens out before us an endless course in which all the blessedness that belongs to the entertaining and preservation of ancient convictions, life-long friends, and familiar truths, and all the antithetical blessedness that belongs to the joy of seeing, rising upon our horizon as some new planet with lustrous light, will be united in our experience. We shall at once be conservative and progressive; holding by the old Christ and the old commandment, and finding that both have in them endless novelty. The trunk is old; every summer brings fresh leaves. And at last we may hope to com-

to the new Jerusalem, and drink the new wine of the Kingdom, and yet find that the old love remains, and that the new Christ, whose presence makes the new heavens and the new earth, is 'the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever,' the old Christ whom, amid the shadows of earth, we tried to love and copy.

YOUTHFUL STRENGTH

'I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.'—1 JOHN ii. 14.

'WHAT am I going to be?' is the question that presses upon young people stepping out of the irresponsibilities of childhood into youth. But, unfortunately, the question is generally supposed to be answered when they have fixed upon a trade or profession. It means, rightly taken, a great deal more than that. 'What am I going to make of myself?' 'What ideal have I before me, towards which I constantly press?' is a question that I would fain lay upon the hearts of all that now hear me. For the misery and the reason of the failure of so many lives is simply that people have never fairly looked that question in the face and tried to answer it, but drift and drift, and let circumstances determine them. And, of course, in a world like this, such people are sure to turn out what such an immense number of people do turn out, failures as far as all God's purposes with humanity are concerned. The absence of a clear ideal is the misery and the loss of all young people who do not possess it.

So here in my text is an old man's notion of what young men ought to be and may be. 'Ye are strong,

and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.'

So said the aged John to some amongst his hearers in these corrupt Asiatic cities. It was not merely a fair ideal painted upon vacancy, but it was a portrait of actual young Christians in these little Asiatic churches. And I would fain have some of you take this realised ideal for yours and see to it that your lives be conformed to it.

There are three points here. The Apostle, first of all, lays his finger upon the strength, which is something more than mere physical strength, proper to youth. Then he lets us see the secret source of that strength: 'Ye have the word of God abiding in you.' And then he shows the field on which it should be exercised, and the victory which it secures: 'And ye have overcome the wicked one.' Now let me touch upon these three points briefly in succession.

I. First, then, note here the strength which you young people ought to covet and to aim at.

It is not merely the physical strength proper to their age, nor the mere unworn buoyancy and vigour which sorrows and care and responsibilities have not thinned and weakened. These are great and precious gifts. We never know how precious they are until they have slipped away from us. These are great and precious gifts, to be preserved as long as may be, by purity and by moderation, and to be used for high and great purposes. But the strength that is in thews and muscles is not the strength that the Apostle is speaking about here, nor anything that belongs simply to the natural stage of your development, whether it be purely physical or purely mental. Samson was a far weaker man than the poor little Jew 'whose bodily presence was weak and his

speech contemptible,' and who all his days carried about with him that 'thorn in the flesh.' It is not your body that is to be strong, but yourselves.

Now the foundation of all true strength lies here, in a good, strong will. In this world, unless a man has learned to say 'No!' and to say it very decidedly, and to stick to it, he will never come to any good. Two words contain the secret of noble life: '*Resist!*' and '*Persist!*' And the true strength of manhood lies in this mainly, that, in spite of all antagonisms, hindrances, voices, and things that array themselves against you, having greatly resolved, you do greatly do what you have resolved, and having said 'I will!' let neither men nor devils lead you to say, 'I will not.' Depend upon it, that to be weak in this direction is to be weak all through. Strong passions make weak men. And a strong will is the foundation, in this wicked and antagonistic world in which we live, of all real strength.

But then the strength that I would have you seek, and strive to cultivate, must be a strength of will founded upon strong reason. Determination unenlightened is obstinacy, and obstinacy is weakness. A mule can beat you at that: 'Be ye not as the mule, which have no understanding.' A determination which does not take into its view all the facts of the case, nor is influenced by these, has no right to call itself strength. It is only, to quote a modern saying—I know not whether true of the person to whom it was originally applied or no—is 'only a lath painted to look like iron.' Unintelligent obstinacy is folly, like the conduct of some man who sticks to his pick and his task in a quarry after the bugle has warned him of an impending explosion, which will blow him to atoms.

But that is not all. A strong will, illuminated by a strong beam of light from the understanding, must be guided and governed by a strong hand put forth by Conscience. 'I should like' is the weakling's motto. 'I will' may be an obstinate fool's motto. 'I ought, therefore, God helping me, and though the devil hinders me, I will,' is a man's. Conscience is king. To obey it is to be free; to neglect it is to be a slave.

Is not this a better ideal for life than gathering any outward possessions, however you may succeed therein? A thousand things will have to be taken into account, and may help or may hinder outward prosperity and success. But nobody can hinder you working at your character and succeeding in making it what it ought to be; and to form character is the end of life. 'To be weak is miserable, doing or suffering.' Ay! that is true, though Milton put it into the devil's mouth. And there is only one strength that will last, 'for even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fail.' But the strength of a fixed and illuminated and conscience-guided will, which governs the man and is governed by God, shall never faint or grow weak. This is the strength which we should seek, and which I ask you to make the conscious aim of your lives.

II. Now note, secondly, how to get it.

'Ye are strong, and the Word of God abideth in you.' Those young Asiatic Christians, that John had in his eye, had learned the secret and the conditions of this strength; and not only in limb and sinew, or in springy and elastic buoyancy of youthful, mental, and spiritual vigour were they strong, but they were so because 'the Word of God abode in them.' Now, there are two significations of that great expression, both of them frequent

in John's Gospel, and both of them, I think, transferred to this Epistle, each of which may yield us a word of counsel. By 'the Word of God,' as I take it, is meant—perhaps I ought to say *both*, but, at all events, *either*—the revelation of God's truth in Holy Scripture, or the personal revelation of the will and nature of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. Whichever of these two meanings—and at bottom they come to be one—we attach to this expression, we draw from them an exhortation. Let me put this very briefly.

Let me say to you, then, if you want to be strong, let Scripture truth occupy and fill and be always present to your mind. There are powers to rule and to direct all conduct, motive powers of the strongest character in these great truths of God's revelation. They are meant to influence a man in all his doings, and it is for us to bring the greatest and solemnest of them to bear on the smallest things of our daily life. Suppose, now, that you go to your work, and some little difficulty starts up in your path, or some trivial annoyance ruffles your temper, or some lurking temptation is suddenly sprung upon you. Suppose your mind and heart were saturated with God's truth, with the great thoughts of His being, of His love, of His righteousness, of Christ's death for you, of Christ's presence with you, of Christ's guardianship over you, of Christ's present will that you should walk in His ways, of the bright hopes of the future, and the solemn vision of that great White Throne and the retribution that streams thence, do you think it would be possible for you to fall into sin, to yield to temptation, to be annoyed by any irritation or bother, or overweighted by any duty? No! Whosoever lives with the thoughts that God has given us in His Word familiar to His mind and within

easy reach of His hand, has therein an armlet against all possible temptation, a test that will unveil the hidden corruption in the sweetest seductions, and a calming power that will keep his heart still and collected in the midst of agitations. If the Word of God in that lower sense of the principles involved in the gospel of Jesus Christ, dwell in your hearts, the fangs are taken out of the serpent. If you drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt you, and you will 'be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.'

Bring the greatest truths you can find to bear on the smallest duties, and the small duties will grow great to match the principles by which they are done. Bring the laws of Jesus Christ down to the little things, for, in the name of common sense, if our religion is not meant to regulate trifles, what is it meant to regulate? Life is made up of trifles. There are half a dozen crises in the course of your life, but there are a thousand trivial things in the course of every day. It would be a poor kind of regulating principle that controlled the crises, and left us alone to manage with the trifles the best way we could.

But in order that there shall be this continual operation of the motives and principles involved in the gospel upon our daily lives, we must have them very near our hand, ready to be laid hold of. The soldier that would march through an enemy's country, having left his gun in the hands of some camp follower, would be very likely to be shot before he got his gun. I remember going through the Red Sea; at the mouth of it where the entrance is narrow, and the currents run strong, when the ship approaches the dangerous place, the men take their stations at appointed places, and the ponderous anchors are

loosened and ready to be dropped in an instant if the swirl of the current sweeps the ship into dangerous proximity to the reef. It is no time to cut the lashings of the anchors when the keel is grating on the coral rocks. And it is no time to have to look about for our weapons when the sudden temptation leaps upon us like a strong man armed. You must have them familiar to you by devout meditation, by frequent reflection, prayer, study of God's Word, if they are to be of any use to you at all. And I am afraid that about the last book in the world that loads of young men and women think of sitting down to read, systematically and connectedly, is the Bible. You will read sermons and other religious books; you will read newspapers, pamphlets, novels; but the Scripture, in its entirety, is a strange book to myriads of men who call themselves Christians. And so they are weak. If you want to be strong, 'let the Word of God abide in your hearts.'

And then if we take the other view, which at bottom is not another, of the meaning of this phrase, and apply it rather to the personal word, Jesus Christ Himself, that will yield us another exhortation, and that is, let Jesus Christ into your hearts and keep Him there, and He will make you strong. I believe that it is no piece of metaphor or an exaggerated way of putting the continuance of the influence of Christ's example and Christ's teaching upon men's hearts and minds, when He tells us that 'if any man open the door He will come in and sup with him.' I want to urge the one thought on you that it is possible, in simple literal fact, for that Divine Saviour, who was 'in Heaven' whilst He walked on earth, and walks on earth to-day when He has returned to His native Heaven, to enter into my spirit and yours, and really

to abide within us, the life of our lives, 'the strength of our hearts, and our portion for ever.' The rest of us can render help to one another by strength ministered from without; Jesus Christ will come into your hearts, if you let Him, in His very sweetness and omnipotence of power, and will breathe His own grace into your weakness, strengthening you as from within. Others can help you from without, as you put an iron band round some over-weighted, crumbling brick pillar in order to prevent it from collapsing, but He will pass into us as you may drive an iron rod up through the centre of the column, and make it strong inside, and we shall be strong if Jesus Christ dwells within us. Open the door, dear young friends; let Christ come into your hearts, which He will do if you do not hinder Him, and if you ask Him. Trust Him with simple reliance upon Him for everything. Faith is 'the door'; the door is nothing of itself, but when it is opened it admits the guest. So do you let that Master come and abide, and you will hear Him say to you, as He said of old, 'Child! My grace is sufficient.' How modest He is. Sufficient!—an ocean *enough* to fill a thimble! 'My grace is sufficient for thee; and My strength is made perfect in weakness.'

III. Now, lastly, notice the field on which the strength is to be exercised, and the victory which it secures. 'Ye have overcome the wicked one.'

There is a battle for us all, on which I need not dwell, the conflict with evil around and with evil within, and with the prince of the embattled legions of the darkness, whom the New Testament has more clearly revealed to us. You young people have many advantages in the conflict; you have some special disadvantages as well. You

have strong passions, you have not much experience, you do not know how bitter the dregs are of the cup whose foaming bubbles look so attractive, and whose upper inch tastes so sweet. But on the other hand you have not yet contracted habits that it is misery to indulge in, and, as it would seem, impossible to break, and the world is yet before you.

You cannot begin too soon to choose your side. And here is the side on which alone victory is possible for a man—the side of Jesus Christ, who will teach your hands to war and your fingers to fight.

Notice that remarkable phrase, ‘Ye have overcome the wicked one.’ He is talking to young Christians before whom the battle may seem to lie, and yet He speaks of their conquest as an accomplished fact, and as a thing behind them. What does that mean? It means this, that if you will take service in Christ’s army, and by His grace resolve to be His faithful soldier till your life’s end, that act of faith, which enrolls you as His, is itself the victory which guarantees, if it be continued, the whole conquest in time.

There used to be an old superstition that—

‘Who sheds the foremost foeman’s life
His party conquers in the strife’;

and whosoever has exercised, however imperfectly and feebly, the faith in Jesus Christ the Lord has therein conquered the devil and all his works, and Satan is henceforth a beaten Satan, and the battle, in essence, is completed even in the act of its being begun.

‘This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith’; not only because our confidence in Jesus Christ is the blowing of the bugle that summons to warfare and

shakes off the tyrant's yoke, but it is also the means by which we join ourselves to Him who has overcome, and make His victory ours. He has fought our antagonist in the wilderness once, in Gethsemane twice, on the Cross thrice; and the perfect conquest in which Jesus bound the strong man and spoiled his goods may become, and will become, your conquest, if you wed yourselves to that dear Lord by simple faith in Him.

What a priceless thing it is that you may begin your independent manhood with a conquest that will draw after it ultimate and supreme victory. You will still have to fight, but you will have only to fight detachments. If you trust yourselves to Jesus Christ you have conquered the main body of the army, and it is only the stragglers that you will have to contend with hereafter. He that loves Jesus, and has given himself to Him, has pinned the dragon to the ground by its head, and though it may 'swinge the scaly horror of its folded tail,' and twine its loathly coils around him, yet he has conquered, and he is conquering, and he will conquer. Only let him hold fast by the hand which brings strength into him by its touch.

Will you, dear young friends, take service in this army? Do you want to be weak or strong? Do you want your lives to be victorious whatever may happen to them in the way of outward prosperity or failure? Then give yourselves to this Lord. His voice calls you to be His soldiers. He will cover your heads in the day of battle. He will strengthen you 'with might by His Spirit in the inner man.' He will hide His Word in your heart that you offend not against Him. He will dwell Himself within you to make you strong in your extremest weakness and victorious over your mightiest foe; and in that

sign you will conquer and 'be more than conquerors through Him that loved you.'

Oh, I pray that you may ask yourselves the question, 'What am I going to be?' and may answer it, 'I am going to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might'; and to overcome, as He also hath overcome, the world and the flesh and the devil.

RIVER AND ROCK

'The world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.'—1 JOHN ii. 17.

JOHN has been solemnly giving a charge not to love the world, nor the things that are in it. That charge was addressed to 'children,' 'young men,' 'fathers.' Whether these designations be taken as referring to growth and maturity of Christian experience, or of natural age, they equally carry the lesson that no age and no stage is beyond the danger of being drawn away by the world's love, or beyond the need of the solemn dehortation therefrom.

My text is the second of the reasons which the Apostle gives for his earnest charge. We all, therefore, need it, and we always need it; though on the last Sunday of another year, it may be more than usually appropriate to turn our thoughts in its direction. 'The world passeth away, and the lust thereof.' Let us lay the handful of snow on our fevered foreheads and cool our desires.

Now there are but two things set forth in this text, which is a great and wonderful antithesis between something which is in perpetual flux and passage and some-

thing which is permanent. If I might venture to cast the two thoughts into metaphorical form, I should say that here are a river and a rock. The one, the sad truth of sense, universally believed and as universally forgotten; the other, the glad truth of faith, so little regarded or operative in men's lives.

I ask you, then, to look with me for a few moments at each of these thoughts.

I. First, then, the river, or the sad truth of sense.

Now you observe that there are two things in my text of which this transiency is predicated, the one 'the world,' the other 'the lust thereof'; the one outside us, the other within us. As to the former, I need only, I suppose, remind you in a sentence that what John means by 'the world' is not the material globe on which we dwell, but the whole aggregate of things visible and material, together with the lives of the men whose lives are directed to, and bounded by, that visible and material, and all considered as wrenched apart from God. That, and not the mere external physical creation, is what he means by 'the world,' and therefore the passing away of which he speaks is not only (although, of course, it includes) the decay and dissolution of material things, but the transiency of things which are or have to do with the visible, and are separated by us from God. Over all these, he says, there is written the sentence, 'Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return.' There is a continual flowing on of the stream. As the original implies even more strongly than in our translation, 'the world' is in the act of 'passing away.' Like the slow travelling of the scenes of some moveable panorama which glide along, even as the eye looks upon them, and are concealed behind the side flats before the gazer has taken in the

whole picture, so equably, constantly, silently, and therefore unnoticed by us, all is in a state of continual motion. There is no *present* time. Even whilst we name the moment it dies. The drop hangs for an instant on the verge, gleaming in the sunlight, and then falls into the gloomy abyss that silently sucks up years and centuries. There is no present, but all is movement.

Brethren, that has been the commonplace of moralists and poets and preachers from the beginning of time; and it would be folly for me to suppose that I can add anything to the impressiveness of the thought. All that I want to do is to wake you up to preach it to yourselves, for that is the only thing that is of any use.

‘So passeth, in the passing of an hour
Of mortal life, the leaf, the bud, the flower.’

But besides this transiency external to us, John finds a corresponding transiency within us. ‘The world passeth, and the lust thereof.’ Of course the word ‘lust’ is employed by him in a much wider sense than in our use of it. With us it means one specific and very ugly form of earthly desire. With him it includes the whole genus—all desires of every sort, more or less noble or ignoble, which have this for their characteristic, that they are directed to, stimulated by, and fed or starved on, the fleeting things of this outward life. If thus a man has anchored himself to that which has no perpetual stay, so long as the cable holds he follows the fate of the thing to which he has pinned himself. And if it perish he perishes, in a very profound sense, with it. If you trust yourselves in the leaky vessel, when the water rises in *it* it will drown *you*, and you will go to the bottom with the craft to which you have trusted yourselves. If you

embark in the little ship that carries Christ and His fortunes, you will come with Him to the haven.

But these fleeting desires, of which my text speaks, point to that sad feature of human experience, that we all outgrow and leave behind us, and think of very little value, the things that once to us were all but heaven. There was a time when toys and sweetmeats were our treasures, and since that day how many burnt-out hopes we all have had! How little we should know ourselves if we could go back to the fears and wishes and desires that used to agitate us ten, twenty, thirty years ago! They lie behind us, no longer part of ourselves; they have slipped away from us, and

‘We all are changed, by still degrees,
All but the basis of the soul.’

The self-conscious same man abides, and yet how different the same man is! Our lives, then will zig-zag instead of keeping a straight course, if we let desires that are limited by anything that we can see guide and regulate us.

But, brethren, though it be a digression from my text, I cannot help touching for a moment upon a yet sadder thought than that. There are desires that *remain*, when the gratification of them has become impossible. Sometimes the lust outlasts the world, sometimes the world outlasts the lust; and one knows not whether is the sadder. There is a hell upon earth for many of us who, having set our affections upon some creatural object, and having had that withdrawn from us, are ready to say, ‘They have taken away my gods! And what shall I do?’ And there is a hell of the same sort waiting beyond those dark gates through which we have all to pass, where men

who never desired anything, except what the world that has slipped out of their reluctant fingers could give them, are shut up with impossible longings after a for-ever-vanished good. 'Father Abraham! a drop of water; for I am tormented in this flame.' That is what men come to, if the fire of their lust burn after its objects are withdrawn.

But let me remind you that this transiency of which I have been speaking receives very strange treatment from most of us. I do not know that it is altogether to be regretted that it so seldom comes to men's consciousness. Perhaps it is right that it should not be uppermost in our thoughts always; but yet there is no vindication for the entire oblivion to which we condemn it. The march of these fleeting things is like that of cavalry with their horses' feet wrapped in straw, in the night, across the snow, silent and unnoticed. We cannot realise the revolution of the earth, because everything partakes in it. We talk about standing still, and we are whirling through space with inconceivable rapidity. By a like illusion we deceive ourselves with the notion of stability, when everything about us is hastening away. Some of you do not like to be reminded of it, and think it a killjoy. You try to get rid of the thought, and hide your head in the sand, and fancy that the rest of your body presents no mark to the archer's arrow. Now surely common sense says to all, that if there be some fact certain and plain and applying to you, which, if accepted, would profoundly modify your life, you ought to take it into account. And what I want you to do, dear friends, now, is to look in the face this fact, which you all acknowledge so utterly that some of you are ready to say, 'What was the use of coming to a chapel to hear that threadbare old

thing dinned into my ears again?' and to take it into account in shaping your lives. Have you done so? Have you? Suppose a man that lived in a land habitually shaken by earthquakes were to say, 'I mean to ignore the fact; and I am going to build a house just as if there was not such a thing as an earthquake expected'; he would have it toppling about his ears very soon. Suppose a man upon the ice-slopes of the Alps was to say, 'I am going to ignore slipperiness and gravitation,' he would before long find himself, if there was any consciousness left in him, at the bottom of a precipice, bruised and bleeding. And suppose a man says, 'I am not going to take the fleetingness of the things of earth into account at all, but intend to live as if all things were to remain as they are' what would become of him do you think? Is he a wise man or a fool? And is he *you*? He *is* some of you! 'So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.'

Then let me say to you, see that you take noble lessons out of these undeniable and all-important facts. There is one kind of lesson that I do not want you to take out of it. 'Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die,' or, to put it into a more vulgar formula, 'A short life and a merry one.' The mere contemplation of the transiency of earthly things may, and often does, lend itself to very ignoble conclusions, and men draw from it the thought that, as life is short, they had better crowd into it as much of sensual enjoyment as they can.

'Gather ye roses while ye may' is a very common keynote, struck by poets of the baser sort. And it is a thought that influences some of us, I have little doubt. Or there may be another consideration. 'Make hay

whilst the sun shines.' 'Hurry on your getting rich, because you have not very long to do it in'; or the like.

Now all that is supremely unworthy. The true lesson to be drawn is the plain, old one which it is never superfluous to shout into men's ears, until they have obeyed it—viz., 'Set not thine heart on that which is not; and which flieth away as an eagle towards heaven.' Do you, dear brother, see to it, that your roots go down through the gravel on the surface. Do you see to it that you dig deeper than that; and thrusting your hand, as it were, through the thin, silk-paper screen that stands between you and the Eternal, grasp the hand that you will find on the other side, waiting and ready to clasp you, and to hold you up.

When they build a new house in Rome they have to dig down through sometimes sixty or a hundred feet of rubbish that runs like water, the ruins of old temples and palaces, once occupied by men in the same flush of life in which we are now. We too have to dig down through ruins, until we get to the Rock and build there, and build secure. Withdraw your affections and your thoughts and your desires from the fleeting, and fix them on the permanent. If a captain takes anything but the pole-star for his fixed point he will lose his reckoning, and his ship will be on the reefs. If we take anything but God for our supreme delight and desire we shall perish.

Then let me say, too, let this thought stimulate us to crowd every moment, as full as it can be packed, with noble work and heavenly thoughts. These fleeting things are elastic, and you may put all but infinite treasure into them. Think of what the possibilities, for each of us, of this dying year were on the 1st of January; and of

what the realisation has been by the 28th of December. So much that we could have done! so little that we have done! So many ripples of the river have passed, bearing no golden sand to pile upon the shore! 'We have been' is a sad word; but oh, the one sad word is, 'We might have been!' And, so, do you see to it that you fill time with that which is kindred to eternity, and make 'one day as a thousand years' in the elastic possibilities and realities of consecration and of service.

Further, let the thought help us to the conviction of the relative insignificance of all that can change. That will not spoil nor shade any real joy; rather it will add to it poignancy that prevents it from cloying or from becoming the enemy of our souls. But the thought will wondrously lighten the burden that we have to carry, and the tasks which we have to perform. 'But for a moment,' makes all light. There was an old rabbi, long ago, whose real name was all but lost, because everybody nick-named him 'Rabbi Thisalso.' The reason was because he had perpetually on his lips the saying about everything as it came, 'This also will pass.' He was a wise man. Let us go to his school and learn his wisdom.

II. Now let me say a word, and it can only be a word, about the second of the thoughts here, which I designated as the Rock, or the glad truth of Faith.

We might have expected that John's antithesis to the world that passeth would have been the God that abides. But he does not so word his sentence, although the thought of the divine permanence underlies it. Rather over against the fleeting world he puts the abiding man who does the will of God.

Of course there is a very solemn sense in which all

men, even they who have most exclusively lived for what they call the present, do last for ever, and in which their deeds do so too. After death is the judgment, and the issues of eternity depend upon the actions of time; and every fleeting thought comes back to the hand that projected it, like the Australian savage's boomerang that, flung out, returns and falls at the feet of the thrower. But that is not what John means by 'abiding for ever.' He means something very much more blessed and lofty than that; and the following is the course of his thought. There is only one permanent Reality in the universe, and that is God. All else is shadow and He is the substance. All else was, is, and is not. He is the One who was, is, and is to come, the timeless and only permanent Being. The will of God is the permanent element in all changeful material things. And consequently he who does the will of God links himself with the Divine Eternity, and becomes partaker of that solemn and blessed Being which lives above mutation.

Obedience to God's will is the permanent element in human life. Whosoever humbly and trustfully seeks to mould his will after the divine will, and to bring God's will into practice in his doings, that man has pierced through the shadows and grasped the substance, and partakes of the Immortality which he adores and serves. Himself shall live for ever in the true life which is blessedness. His deeds shall live for ever when all that lifted itself in opposition to the Divine will shall be crushed and annihilated. They shall live in His own peaceful consciousness; they shall live in the blessed rewards which they shall bring to the doers. His habits will need no change.

What will you do when you are dead? You have to go

into a world where there are no gossip and no housekeeping; no mills and no offices; no shops, no books; no colleges and no sciences to learn. What will you do there? 'He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.' If you have done your housekeeping, and your weaving and spinning, and your book-keeping, and your buying and selling, and your studying, and your experimenting with a conscious reference to God, it is all right. That has made the act capable of eternity, and there will be no need for such a man to change. The material on which he works will change, but the inner substance of his life will be unaffected by the trivial change from earth to heaven. Whilst the endless ages roll he will be doing just what he was doing down here; only here he was playing with counters, and yonder he will be trusted with gold, and dominion over ten cities. To all other men the change that comes when earth passes from them, or they from it, is as when a trench is dug across a railway, into which the express goes with a smash, and there is an end. To the man who, in the trifles of time, has been obeying the will of God, and therefore subserving eternity and his interests there, the trench is bridged, and he will go on after he crosses it just as he did before, with the same purpose, the same desires, the same submission, and the same drinking into himself of the fullness of immortal life.

Brother, John tells us that obedience to the will of God brings permanence into our fleeting years. But how are we to obey the will of God? John tells us that the only way is by love. But how are we to love God? John tells us that the only way to love—which love is the only way to obedience—is by knowing and believing the love that God hath to us. But how are we to know that God hath

love to us? John tells us that the only way to know the love of God, which is the only way of our loving Him, which in its turn is the only way to obedience, which again is the only way to permanence of life, is to believe in Jesus Christ and His propitiation for our sins. The river flows on for ever, but it sweeps round the base of the Rock of Ages. And in Him, by faith in His blood, we may find our sure refuge and eternal home.

THE LOVE THAT CALLS US SONS

'Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God. . . . '—1 JOHN iii. 1.

ONE or two points of an expository character will serve to introduce what else I have to say on these words.

The text is, I suppose, generally understood as if it pointed to the fact that we are called the sons of God as the great exemplification of the wonderfulness of His love. That is a perfectly possible view of the connection and meaning of the text. But if we are to translate with perfect accuracy we must render, not 'that we should be called,' but '*in order that* we should be called the sons of God.' The meaning then is that the love bestowed is the means by which the design that we should be called His sons is accomplished. What John calls us to contemplate with wonder and gratitude is not only the fact of this marvellous love, but also the glorious end to which it has been given to us and works. There seems no reason for slurring over this meaning in favour of the more vague 'that' of our version. God gives His great and wonderful love in Jesus Christ, and all the gifts and powers which

live in Him like fragrance in the rose. All this lavish bestowal of love, unspeakable as it is, may be regarded as having one great end, which God deems worthy of even such expenditure, namely, that men should become, in the deepest sense, His children. It is not so much to the contemplation of our blessedness in being sons, as to the devout gaze on the love which, by its wonderful process, has made it possible for us to be sons, that we are summoned here.

Again, you will find a remarkable addition to our text in the Revised Version—namely, ‘and such we are.’ Now these words come with a very great weight of manuscript authority, and of internal evidence. They are parenthetical, a kind of rapid ‘aside’ of the writer’s, expressing his joyful confidence that he and his brethren are sons of God, not only in name, but in reality. They are the voice of personal assurance, the voice of the spirit ‘by which we cry Abba, Father,’ breaking in for a moment on the flow of the sentence, like an irrepressible, glad answer to the Father’s call. With these explanations let us look at the words.

I. The love that is given.

We are called upon to come with our little vessels to measure the contents of the great ocean, to plumb with our short lines the infinite abyss, and not only to estimate the quantity but the quality of that love, which, in both respects, surpasses all our means of comparison and conception.

Properly speaking, we can do neither the one nor the other, for we have no line long enough to sound its depths, and no experience which will give us a standard with which to compare its quality. But all that we can do, John would have us do—that is, look and ever look

at the working of that love till we form some not wholly inadequate idea of it.

We can no more 'behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us' than we can look with undimmed eyes right into the middle of the sun. But we can in some measure imagine the tremendous and beneficent forces that ride forth horsed on his beams to distances which the imagination faints in trying to grasp, and reach their journey's end unwearied and ready for their task as when it began. Here are we, ninety odd millions of miles from the centre of the system, yet warmed by its heat, lighted by its beams, and touched for good by its power in a thousand ways. All that has been going on for no one knows how many æons. How mighty the Power which produces these effects! In like manner, who can gaze into the fiery depths of that infinite God-head, into the ardours of that immeasurable, incomparable, inconceivable love? But we can look at and measure its activities. We can see what it does, and so can, in some degree, understand it, and feel that after all we have a measure for the Immeasurable, a comparison for the Incomparable, and can *thus* 'behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us.'

So we have to turn to the work of Christ, and especially to His death, if we would estimate the love of God. According to John's constant teaching, that is the great proof that God loves us. The most wonderful revelation to every heart of man of the depths of that Divine heart lies in the gift of Jesus Christ. The Apostle bids me 'behold what manner of love.' I turn to the Cross, and I see there a love which shrinks from no sacrifice, but gives 'Him up to death for us all.' I turn to the Cross, and I see there a love which is evoked by no loveliness

on my part, but comes from the depth of His own Infinite Being, who loves because He must, and who must because He is God. I turn to the Cross, and I see there manifested a love which sighs for recognition, which desires nothing of me but the repayment of my poor affection, and longs to see its own likeness in me. And I see there a love that will not be put away by sinfulness, and shortcomings, and evil, but pours its treasures on the unworthy, like sunshine on a dunghill. So, streaming through the darkness of eclipse, and speaking to me even in the awful silence in which the Son of Man died there for sin, I 'behold,' and I hear, the 'manner of love that the Father hath bestowed upon us,' stronger than death and sin, armed with all power, gentler than the fall of the dew, boundless and endless, in its measure measureless, in its quality transcendent—the love of God to me in Jesus Christ my Saviour.

In like manner we have to think, if we would estimate the 'manner of this love,' that through and in the great sacrifice of Jesus Christ there comes to us the gift of a divine life like His own. Perhaps it may be too great a refinement of interpretation; but it certainly does seem to me that that expression 'to bestow His love upon' us, is not altogether the same as 'to love us,' but that there is a greater depth in it. There may be some idea of that love itself being as it were infused into us, and not merely of its consequences or tokens being given to us; as Paul speaks of 'the love of God shed abroad in our hearts' by the spirit which is given to us. At all events this communication of divine life, which is at bottom divine love—for God's life is God's love—is His great gift to men.

Be that as it may, these two are the great tokens,

consequences, and measures of God's love to us—the gift of Christ, and that which is the sequel and outcome thereof, the gift of the Spirit which is breathed into Christian spirits. These two gifts, which are one gift, embrace all that the world needs. Christ for us and Christ in us must both be taken into account if you would estimate the manner of the love that God has bestowed upon us.

We may gain another measure of the greatness of this love if we put an emphasis—which I dare say the writer did not intend—on one word of this text, and think of the love given to '*us*,' such creatures as we are. Out of the depths we cry to Him. Not only by the voice of our supplications, but even when we raise no call of entreaty, our misery pleads with His merciful heart, and from the heights there comes upon our wretchedness and sin the rush of this great love, like a cataract, which sweeps away all our sins, and floods us with its own blessedness and joy. The more we know ourselves, the more wonderingly and thankfully shall we bow down our hearts before Him, as we measure His mercy by our unworthiness.

From all His works the same summons echoes. They all call us to see mirrored in them His loving care. But the Cross of Christ and the gift of a Divine Spirit cry aloud to every ear in tones of more beseeching entreaty and of more imperative command to '*behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us.*'

II. Look next at the sonship which is the purpose of His given Love.

It has often been noticed that the Apostle John uses for that expression '*the sons of God*,' another word from that which his brother Paul uses. John's phrase would

perhaps be a little more accurately translated 'children of God,' whilst Paul, on the other hand, very seldom says 'children,' but almost always says 'sons.' Of course the children are sons and the sons are children, but still, the slight distinction of phrase is characteristic of the men, and of the different points of view from which they speak about the same thing. John's word lays stress on the children's kindred nature with their father and on their immature condition.

But without dwelling on that, let us consider this great gift and dignity of being children of God, which is the object that God has in view in all the lavish bestowment of His goodness upon us.

That end is not reached by God's making us men. Over and above that He has to send this great gift of His love, in order that the men whom He has made may become His sons. If you take the context here you will see very clearly that the writer draws a broad distinction between 'the sons of God' and 'the world' of men who do not comprehend them, and so far from being themselves sons, do not even know God's sons when they see them. And there is a deeper and solemn word still in the context. John thinks that men (within the range of light and revelation, at all events) are divided into two families—'the children of God and the children of the devil.' There *are* two families amongst men.

Thank God, the prodigal son in his rags amongst the swine, and lying by the swine-troughs in his filth and his husks, and his fever, *is* a son! No doubt about that! He has these three elements and marks of sonship that no man ever gets rid of: he is of a divine origin, he has a divine likeness in that he has got mind

and will and spirit, and he is the object of a divine love.

The doctrine of the New Testament about the Fatherhood of God and the sonship of man does not in the slightest degree interfere with these three great truths, that all men, though the features of the common humanity may be almost battered out of recognition in them, are all children of God because He made them; that they are children of God because still there lives in them something of the likeness of the creative Father; and, blessed be His name! that they are all children of God because He loves and provides and cares for every one of them.

All that is blessedly and eternally true; but it is also true that there is a higher relation than that to which the name 'children of God' is more accurately given, and to which in the New Testament that name is confined. If you ask what that relation is, let me quote to you three passages in this Epistle which will answer the question. 'Whoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God,' that is the first; 'Every one that doeth righteousness is born of God,' that is the second; 'Every one that loveth is born of God,' that is the third. Or to put them all into one expression which holds them all, in the great words of his prologue in the first chapter of John's Gospel you find this: 'To as many as received Him to them gave He power to become the sons of God.' Believing in Christ with loving trust produces, and doing righteousness and loving the brethren, as the result of that belief, prove the fact of sonship in its highest and its truest sense.

What is implied in that great word by which the Almighty gives us a name and a place as of sons and

daughters? Clearly, first, a communicated life, therefore, second, a kindred nature which shall be 'pure as He is pure,' and, third, growth to full maturity.

This sonship, which is no mere empty name, is the aim and purpose of God's dealings, of all the revelation of His love, and most especially of the great gift of His love in Christ. Has that purpose been accomplished in you? Have you ever looked at that great gift of love that God has given you on purpose to make you His child? If you have, has it made you one? Are you trusting to Jesus Christ, whom God has sent forth that we might receive the standing of sons in Him? Are you a child of God because a brother of that Saviour? Have you received the gift of a divine life through Him? My friend, remember the grim alternative! A child of God or a child of the devil! Bitter words, narrow words, uncharitable words—as people call them! And I believe, and therefore I am bound to say it, *true* words, which it concerns *you* to lay to heart.

III. Now, still further, let me ask you to look at the glad recognition of this sonship by the child's heart.

I have already referred to the clause added in the Revised Version, 'and such we are.' As I said, it is a kind of 'aside,' in which John adds the Amen for himself and for his poor brothers and sisters toiling and moiling obscure among the crowds of Ephesus, to the great truth. He asserts his and their glad consciousness of the reality of the fact of their sonship, which they know to be no empty title. He asserts, too, the present possession of that sonship, realising it as a fact, amid all the commonplace vulgarities and carking cares and petty aims of life's little day. 'Such we are' is the 'Here am I, Father,' of the child answering the Father's call, 'My Son.'

He turns doctrine into experience. He is not content with merely having the thought in his creed, but his heart clasps it, and his whole nature responds to the great truth. I ask you, do you do that? Do not be content with hearing the truth, or even with assenting to it, and believing it in your understandings. The truth is nothing to you, unless you have made it your very own by faith. Do not be satisfied with the orthodox confession. Unless it has touched your heart and made your whole soul thrill with thankful gladness and quiet triumph, it is nothing to you. The mere belief of thirty-nine or thirty-nine thousand Articles is nothing; but when a man has a true heart-faith in Him, whom all articles are meant to make us know and love, then dogma becomes life, and the doctrine feeds the soul. Does it do so with you, my brother? Can *you* say, 'And such we are?'

Take another lesson. The Apostle was not afraid to say 'I know that I am a child of God.' There are many very good people, whose tremulous, timorous lips have never ventured to say 'I know.' They will say, 'Well, I hope,' or sometimes, as if that was not uncertain enough, they will put in an adverb or two, and say, 'I humbly hope that I am.' It is a far robuster kind of Christianity, a far truer one, ay, and a humbler one too, that throws all considerations of my own character and merits, and all the rest of that rubbish, clean behind me, and when God says, 'My son!' says 'My Father; and when God calls us His children, leaps up and gladly answers, 'And we are!' Do not be afraid of being too confident, if your confidence is built on God, and not on yourselves; but be afraid of being too diffident, and be afraid of having a great deal of self-righteousness masquerad-

ing under the guise of such a profound consciousness of your own unworthiness that you dare not call yourself a child of God. It is not a question of worthiness or unworthiness. It is a question, in the first place, and mainly, of the truth of Christ's promise and the sufficiency of Christ's Cross; and in a very subordinate degree of anything belonging to you.

IV. We have here, finally, the loving and devout gaze upon this wonderful love. 'Behold,' at the beginning of my text, is not the mere exclamation which you often find both in the Old and in the New Testaments, which is simply intended to emphasise the importance of what follows, but it is a distinct command to do the thing, to look, and ever to look, and to look again, and live in the habitual and devout contemplation of that infinite and wondrous love of God.

I have but two remarks to make about that, and the one is this, that such a habit of devout and thankful meditation upon the love of God, as manifested in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and the consequent gift of the Divine Spirit, joined with the humble, thankful conviction that I am a child of God thereby, lies at the foundation of all vigorous and happy Christian life. How can a thing which you do not touch with your hands and see with your eyes produce any effect upon you, unless you think about it? How can a religion which can only influence through thought and emotion do anything in you, or for you, unless you occupy your thoughts and your feelings with it? It is sheer nonsense to suppose it possible. Things which do not appeal to sense are real to us, and indeed we may say, *are* at all for us, only as we think about them. If you had a dear friend in Australia, and never thought about him, he would even cease to be

dear, and it would be all one to you as if he were dead. If he were really dear to you, you *would* think about him. We may say (though, of course, there are other ways of looking at the matter) that, in a very intelligible sense, the degree in which we think about Christ, and in Him behold the love of God, is a fairly accurate measure of our Christianity.

Now will you apply that sharp test to yesterday, and the day before, and the day before that, and decide how much of your life was pagan, and how much of it was Christian? You will never make anything of your professed Christianity, you will never get a drop of happiness or any kind of good out of it; it will neither be a strength nor a joy nor a defence to you unless you make it your habitual occupation to 'behold the manner of love'; and look and look and look until it warms and fills your heart.

The second remark is that we cannot keep that great sight before the eye of our minds without effort. You will have very resolutely to look away from something else if, amid all the dazzling gauds of earth, you are to see the far-off lustre of that heavenly love. Just as timorous people in a thunder-storm will light a candle that they may not see the lightning, so many Christians have their hearts filled with the twinkling light of some miserable tapers of earthly care and pursuits, which, though they be dim and smoky, are bright enough to make it hard to see the silent depths of Heaven, though it blaze with a myriad stars. If you hold a sixpence close enough up to the pupil of your eye, it will keep you from seeing the sun. And if you hold the world close to mind and heart, as many of you do, you will only see, round the rim of it, the least tiny ring of the overlapping love

of God. What the world lets you see you will see, and the world will take care that it will let you see very little—not enough to do you any good, not enough to deliver you from its chains. Wrench yourselves away, my brethren, from the absorbing contemplation of Birmingham jewellery and paste, and look at the true riches. If you have ever had some glimpses of that wondrous love, and have ever been drawn by it to cry, ‘Abba, Father,’ do not let the trifles which belong not to your true inheritance fill your thoughts, but renew the vision, and by determined turning away of your eyes from beholding vanity, look off from the things that are seen, that you may gaze upon the things that are not seen, and chiefest among them, upon the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

If you have never looked on that love, I beseech you now to turn aside and see this great sight. Do not let that brightness burn unnoticed while your eyes are fixed on the ground, like the gaze of men absorbed in gold digging, while a glorious sunshine is flushing the eastern sky. Look to the unspeakable, incomparable, immeasurable love of God, in giving up His Son to death for us all. Look and be saved. Look and live. ‘Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on you,’ and, beholding, you will become the sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty.

THE UNREVEALED FUTURE OF THE SONS OF GOD

‘Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.’—1 JOHN iii. 2.

I HAVE hesitated, as you may well believe, whether I should take these words for a text. They seem so far to surpass anything that can be said concerning them, and they cover such immense fields of dim thought, that one may well be afraid lest one should spoil them by even attempting to dilate on them. And yet they are so closely connected with the words of the previous verse, which formed the subject of my last sermon, that I felt as if my work were only half done unless I followed that sermon with this.

The present is the prophet of the future, says my text: ‘Now we are the sons of God, *and*’ (not ‘but’) ‘it doth not yet appear what we shall be.’ Some men say, ‘Ah! *now* are we, but we shall be—nothing!’ John does not think so. John thinks that if a man is a son of God he will always be so. There are three things in this verse, how, if we are God’s children, our sonship makes us quite sure of the future; how our sonship leaves us largely in ignorance of the future, but how our sonship flings one bright, all-penetrating beam of light on the only important thing about the future, the clear vision of and the perfect likeness to Him who is our life. ‘Now are we the sons of God,’ therefore we shall be. We are the sons; we do not know what we shall be. We are the sons, and therefore, though there be a great circumference of blank ignorance as to our future, yet, blessed be His name, there is a great

light burning in the middle of it! 'We know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.'

I. The fact of sonship makes us quite sure of the future.

I am not concerned to appraise the relative value of the various arguments and proofs, or, it may be, presumptions, which may recommend the doctrine of a future life to men, but it seems to me that the strongest reasons for believing in another world are these two:—first, that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead and has gone up there; and, second, that a man here can pray, and trust, and love God, and feel that he is His child. As was noticed in the preceding sermon, the word rendered 'sons' might more accurately be translated 'children.' If so, we may fairly say, 'We are the *children* of God now—and if we are children now, we shall be grown up some time.' Childhood leads to maturity. The infant becomes a man.

That is to say, he that here, in an infantile way, is stammering with his poor, unskilled lips the name 'Abba! Father!' will one day come to speak it fully. He that dimly trusts, he that partially loves, he that can lift up his heart in some more or less unworthy prayer and aspiration after God, in all these emotions and exercises, has the great proof in himself that such emotions, such relationship, can never be put an end to. The roots have gone down through the temporal, and have laid hold of the Eternal. Anything seems to me to be more credible than that a man who can look up and say, 'My Father,' shall be crushed by what befalls the mere outside of him; anything seems to me to be more believable than to suppose that the nature which is capable of these elevating

emotions and aspirations of confidence and hope, which can know God and yearn after Him, and can love Him, is to be wiped out like a gnat by the finger of Death. The material has nothing to do with these feelings, and if I know myself, in however feeble and imperfect a degree, to be the son of God, I carry in the conviction the very pledge and seal of eternal life. That is a thought 'whose very sweetness yieldeth proof that it was born for immortality.' 'We are the sons of God,' therefore we shall always be so, in all worlds, and whatsoever may become of this poor wrappage in which the soul is shrouded.

We may notice, also, that not only the fact of our sonship avails to assure us of immortal life, but that also the very form which our religious experience takes points in the same direction.

As I said, infancy is the prophecy of maturity. 'The child is father of the man'; the bud foretells the flower. In the same way, the very imperfections of the Christian life, as it is seen here, argue the existence of another state, where all that is here in the germ shall be fully matured, and all that is here incomplete shall attain the perfection which alone will correspond to the power that works in us. Think of the ordinary Christian character. The beginning is there, and evidently no more than the beginning. As one looks at the crudity, the inconsistencies, the failings, the feebleness of the Christian life of others, or of oneself, and then thinks that such a poor, imperfect exhibition is all that so divine a principle has been able to achieve in this world, one feels that there must be a region and a time where we shall be all which the transforming power of God's spirit can make us. The very inconsistencies of Christians are as strong rea-

sons for believing in the perfect life of Heaven as their purities and virtues are. We have a right to say mighty principles are at work upon Christian souls—the power of the Cross, the power of love issuing in obedience, the power of an indwelling Spirit; and is this all that these great forces are going to effect on human character? Surely a seed so precious and divine is somewhere, and at some time, to bring forth something better than these few poor, half-developed flowers, something with more lustrous petals and richer fragrance. The plant is clearly an exotic; does not its obviously struggling growth here tell of warmer suns and richer soil, where it will be at home?

There is a great deal in every man, and most of all in Christian men and women, which does not fit this present. All other creatures correspond in their capacities to the place where they are set down; and the world in which the plant or the animal lives, the world of their surroundings, stimulates to activity all their powers. But that is not so with a man. 'Foxes have holes, birds of the air have nests.' They fit exactly, and correspond to their 'environment.' But a man!—there is an enormous amount of waste faculty about him if he is only to live in this world. There are large capacities in every nature, and most of all in a Christian nature, which are like the packages that emigrants take with them, marked 'Not wanted on the voyage.' These go down into the hold, and they are only of use after landing in the new world. If I am a son of God I have much in me that is 'not wanted on the voyage,' and the more I grow into His likeness, the more I am thrown out of harmony with the things round about me, in proportion as I am brought into harmony with the things beyond.

That consciousness of belonging to another order of things, because I am God's child, will make me sure that when I have done with earth, the tie that binds me to my Father will not be broken, but that I shall go home, where I shall be fully and for ever all that I so imperfectly began to be here, where all gaps in my character shall be filled up, and the half-completed circle of my heavenly perfectness shall grow like the crescent moon, into full-orbed beauty. 'Neither life, nor death, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature' shall be able to break that tie, and banish the child from the conscious grasp of a Father's hand. Dear brother and sister, can you say, 'Now am I a child of God!' Then you may patiently and peacefully front that dim future.

II. Now I come to the second point, namely, that we remain ignorant of much in that future.

That happy assurance of the love of God resting upon me, and making me His child through Jesus Christ, does not dissipate all the darkness which lies on that beyond. 'We are the sons of God, *and*,' just because we are, 'it does not yet appear what we shall be.' Or, as the words are rendered in the Revised Version, 'it is not yet made manifest what we shall be.'

The meaning of that expression, 'It doth not yet appear,' or, 'It is not made manifest,' may be put into very plain words. John would simply say to us, 'There has never been set forth before men's eyes in this earthly life of ours an example, or an instance, of what the sons of God are to be in another state of being.' And so, because men have never had the instance before them, they do not know much about that state.

In some sense there has been a manifestation through

the life of Jesus Christ. Christ has died; Christ is risen again. Christ has gone about amongst men upon earth after Resurrection. Christ has been raised to the right hand of God, and sits there in the glory of the Father. So far it has been manifested what we shall be. But the risen Christ is not the glorified Christ, and although He has set forth before man's senses irrefragably the fact of another life, and to some extent given glimpses and gleams of knowledge with regard to certain portions of it, I suppose that the 'glorious body' of Jesus Christ was not assumed by Him till the cloud 'received Him out of their sight,' nor, indeed, could it be assumed while He moved among the material realities of this world, and did eat and drink before them. So that, while we thankfully recognise that Christ's Resurrection and Ascension have 'brought life and immortality to light,' we must remember that it is the fact, and not the manner of the fact, which they make plain; and that, even after His example, it has not been manifested what is the body of glory which He now wears, and therefore it has not yet been manifested what we shall be when we are fashioned after its likeness.

There has been no manifestation, then, to sense, or to human experience, of that future, and, therefore, there is next to no knowledge about it. You can only know facts when the facts are communicated. You may speculate and argue and guess as much as you like, but that does not thin the darkness one bit. The unborn child has no more faculty or opportunity for knowing what the life upon earth is like than man here, in the world, has for knowing that life beyond. The chrysalis' dreams about what it would be when it was a butterfly would be as reliable as a man's imagination of what a future life will be.

So let us feel two things:—Let us be thankful that we do not know, for the ignorance is the sign of the greatness; and then, let us be sure that just the very mixture of knowledge and ignorance which we have about another world is precisely the food which is most fitted to nourish imagination and hope. If we had more knowledge, supposing it could be given, of the conditions of that future life, it would lose some of its power to attract. Ignorance does not always prevent the occupation of the mind with a subject. Blank ignorance does; but ignorance, shot with knowledge like a tissue which, when you hold it one way seems all black, and when you tilt it another, seems golden, stimulates desire, hope, and imagination. So let us thankfully acquiesce in the limited knowledge.

Fools can ask questions which wise men cannot answer, and will not ask. There are questions which, sometimes, when we are thinking about our own future, and sometimes when we see dear ones go away into the mist, become to us almost torture. It is easy to put them; it is not so easy to say: 'Thank God, we cannot answer them yet!' If we could it would only be because the experience of earth was adequate to measure the experience of Heaven; and that would be to bring the future down to the low levels of this present. Let us be thankful then that so long as we can only speak in language derived from the experiences of earth, we have yet to learn the vocabulary of Heaven. Let us be thankful that our best help to know what we shall be is to reverse much of what we are, and that the loftiest and most positive declarations concerning the future lie in negatives like these:—'I saw no temple therein.' 'There shall be no night there.' 'There shall be no curse

there.' 'There shall be no more sighing nor weeping, for the former things are passed away.'

The white mountains keep their secret well; not until we have passed through the black rocks that make the throat of the pass on the summit, shall we see the broad and shining plains beyond the hills. Let us be thankful for, and own the attractions of, the knowledge that is wrapt in ignorance, and thankfully say, 'Now are we the sons of God, and it doth not appear what we shall be!'

III. Now I must be very brief with the last thought that is here, and I am the less unwilling to be so because we cannot travel one inch beyond the revelations of the Book in reference to the matter. The thought is this, that our sonship flings one all-penetrating beam of light on that future, in the knowledge of our perfect vision and perfect likeness. 'We know that when He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.'

'When He shall be manifested'—to what period does that refer? It seems most natural to take the manifestation here as being the same as that spoken of only a verse or two before. 'And now, little children, abide in Him, and when He shall *be manifested*, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming (ii. 28). That 'coming' then, is the 'manifestation' of Christ; and it is at the period of His coming in His glory that His servants 'shall be like Him, and see Him as He is.' Clearly then it is Christ whom we shall see and become like, and not the Father invisible.

To behold Christ will be the condition and the means of growing like Him. That way of transformation by beholding, or of assimilation by the power of loving con-

temptation, is the blessed way of ennobling character, which even here, and in human relationships, has often made it easy to put off old vices and to clothe the soul with unwonted grace. Men have learned to love and gaze upon some fair character, till some image of its beauty has passed into their ruder natures. To love such and to look on them has been an education. The same process is exemplified in more sacred regions, when men here learn to love and look upon Christ by faith, and so become like Him, as the sun stamps a tiny copy of its blazing sphere on the eye that looks at it. But all these are but poor, far-off hints and low preludes of the energy with which that blessed vision of the glorified Christ shall work on the happy hearts that behold Him, and of the completeness of the likeness to Him which will be printed in light upon their faces.

It matters not, though it doth not yet appear what we shall be, if to all the questionings of our own hearts we have this for our all-sufficient answer, 'We shall be like Him.' As good old Richard Baxter has it:—

'My knowledge of that life is small,
The eye of faith is dim;
But, 'tis enough that Christ knows all,
And I shall be like Him!'

'It is enough for the servant that he be as his Lord.'

There is no need to go into the dark and difficult questions about the manner of that vision. He Himself prayed, in that great intercessory prayer, 'Father, I will that these whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory.' That vision of the glorified manhood of Jesus Christ—certain, direct, clear, and worthy, whether it comes through sense or

through thought—to behold that vision is all the sight of God that men in Heaven ever will have. And through the millenniums of a growing glory, Christ as He is will be the manifested Deity. Likeness will clear sight, and clearer sight will increase likeness. So in blessed interchange these two will be cause and effect, and secure the endless progress of the redeemed spirit towards the vision of Christ which never can behold all His Infinite Fulness, and the likeness to Christ which can never reproduce all his Infinite Beauty.

As a bit of glass when the light strikes it flashes into sunny glory, or as every poor little muddy pool on the pavement, when the sunbeams fall upon it, has the sun mirrored even in its shallow mud, so into your poor heart and mine the vision of Christ's glory will come, moulding and transforming us to its own beauty. With unveiled face reflecting as a mirror does, the glory of the Lord, we 'shall be changed into the same image.' 'We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.'

Dear brethren, all begins with this, love Christ and trust Him and you are a child of God! 'And if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.'

THE PURIFYING INFLUENCE OF HOPE

'And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.'—1 JOHN iii. 3.

THAT is a very remarkable 'and' with which this verse begins. The Apostle has just been touching the very heights of devout contemplation, soaring away up into dim regions where it is very hard to follow,—'We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.'

And now, without a pause, and linking his thoughts together by a simple 'and,' he passes from the unimaginable splendours of the Beatific Vision to the plainest practical talk. Mysticism has often soared so high above the earth that it has forgotten to preach righteousness, and therein has been its weak point. But here is the most mystical teacher of the New Testament insisting on plain morality as vehemently as his friend James could have done.

The combination is very remarkable. Like the eagle he rises, and like the eagle, with the impetus gained from his height, he drops right down on the earth beneath!

And that is not only a characteristic of St. John's teaching, but it is a characteristic of all the New Testament morality—its highest revelations are intensely practical. Its light is at once set to work, like the sunshine that comes ninety millions of miles in order to make the little daisies open their crimson-tipped petals; so the profoundest things that the Bible has to say are said to you and me, not that we may know only, but that knowing we may *do*, and *do* because we *are*.

So John, here: 'We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.' 'And'—a simple coupling-iron for two such thoughts—'every man that hath this hope in Him'—that is, in Christ, not in himself, as we sometimes read it—'every man that hath this hope,' founded on Christ, 'purifies himself even as He is pure.'

The thought is a very simple one, though sometimes it is somewhat mistakenly apprehended. Put into its general form it is just this:—If you expect, and expecting, hope to be like Jesus Christ yonder, you will be trying your best to be like Him here. It is not the mere purify-

ing influence of hope that is talked about, but it is the specific influence of this one hope, the hope of ultimate assimilation to Christ leading to strenuous efforts, each a partial resemblance of Him, here and now. And that is the subject I want to say a word or two about now.

I. First, then, notice the principle that is here, which is the main thing to be insisted upon, namely, If we are to be pure, we must purify *ourselves*.

There are two ways of getting like Christ, spoken about in the context. One is the blessed way, that is more appropriate for the higher Heaven, the way of assimilation and transformation by beholding—‘If we see Him’ we shall be ‘like Him.’ That is the blessed method of the Heavens. Yes, but even here on earth it may to some extent be realised! Love always breeds likeness. And there is such a thing, here on earth and now, as gazing upon Christ with an intensity of affection, and simplicity of trust, and rapture of aspiration, and ardour of desire which shall transform us in some measure into His own likeness. John is an example of that for us. It was a true instinct that made the old painters always represent him as like the Master that he sat beside, even in face. Where did John get his style from? He got it by much meditating upon Christ’s words. The disciple caught the method of the Master’s speech, and to some extent the manner of the Master’s vision.

And so he himself stands before us as an instance of the possibility, even on earth, of this calm, almost passive process, and most blessed and holiest method of getting like the Master, by simple gazing, which is the gaze of love and longing.

But, dear brethren, the law of our lives forbids that that should be the only way in which we grow like

Christ. 'First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear,' was never meant to be the exhaustive, all-comprehensive statement of the method of Christian progress. You and I are not vegetables; and the Parable of the Seed is only one side of the truth about the method of Christian growth. The very word 'purify' speaks to us of another condition; it implies impurity, it implies a process which is more than contemplation, it implies the reversal of existing conditions, and not merely the growth upwards to unattained conditions.

And so growth is not all that Christian men need; they need excision, they need casting out of what is in them; they need change as well as growth. 'Purifying' they need because they are impure, and growth is only half the secret of Christian progress.

Then there is the other consideration, viz., if there is to be this purifying it must be done by myself. 'Ah!' you say, 'done by yourself? That is not evangelical teaching.' Well, let us see. Take two or three verses out of this Epistle which at first sight seem to be contradictory of this. Take the very first that bears on the subject:—'The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin' (i. 7). 'If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness' (iv. 9). 'He that abideth in Him sinneth not' (iii. 6). 'This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith' (v. 4).

Now if you put all these passages together, and think about the general effect of them, it comes to this: that our best way of cleansing ourselves is by keeping firm hold of Jesus Christ and of the cleansing powers that lie in Him. To take a very homely illustration—soap and water wash your hands clean, and what you have to do is

simply to rub the soap and water on to the hand, and bring them into contact with the foulness. You cleanse yourselves. Yes! because without the friction there would not be the cleansing. But is it you, or is it the soap, that does the work? Is it you or the water that makes your hands clean? And so when God comes and says, 'Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings, your hands are full of blood,' He says in effect, 'Take the cleansing that I give you and rub it in, and apply it: and your flesh will become as the flesh of a little child, and you shall be clean.'

That is to say, the very deepest word about Christian effort of self-purifying is this—keep close to Jesus Christ. You cannot sin as long as you hold His hand. To have Him with you;—I mean by that to have the thoughts directed to Him, the love turning to Him, the will submitted to Him, Him consciously with us in the day's work. To have communion with Jesus Christ is like bringing an atmosphere round about us in which all evil will die. If you take a fish out of water and bring it up into the upper air, it writhes and gasps, and is dead presently; and our evil tendencies and sins, drawn up out of the muddy depths in which they live, and brought up into that pure atmosphere of communion with Jesus Christ, are sure to shrivel and to die, and to disappear. We kill all evil by fellowship with the Master. His presence in our lives, by our communion with Him, is like the watchfire that the traveller lights at night—it keeps all the wild beasts of prey away from the fold.

Christ's fellowship is our cleansing, and the first and main thing that we have to do in order to make ourselves pure is to keep ourselves in union with Him, in whom inhere and abide all the energies that cleanse men's

souls. Take the unbleached calico and spread it out on the green grass, and let the blessed sunshine come down upon it, and sprinkle it with fair water; and the grass and the moisture and the sunshine will do all the cleansing, and it will glitter in the light, 'so as no fuller on earth can white it.'

So cleansing is keeping near Jesus Christ. But it is no use getting the mill-race from the stream into your works unless you put wheels in its way to drive. And our holding ourselves in fellowship with the Master in that fashion is not all that we have to do. There have to be distinct and specific efforts, constantly repeated, to subdue and suppress individual acts of transgression. We have to fight against evil, sin by sin. We have not the thing to do all at once; we have to do it in detail. It is a war of outposts, like the last agonies of that Franco-Prussian war, when the Emperor had abdicated, and the country was really conquered, and Paris had yielded, but yet all over the face of the land combats had to be carried on.

So it is with us. Holiness is not feeling; it is character. You do not get rid of your sins by the act of divine amnesty only. You are not perfect because you say you are, and feel as if you were, and think you are. God does not make any man pure in his sleep. His cleansing does not dispense with fighting, but makes victory possible.

Then, dear brethren, lay to heart this, as the upshot of the whole matter: First of all, let us turn to Him from whom all the cleansing comes; and then, moment by moment, remember that it is our work to purify ourselves by the strength and the power that is given to us by the Master.

II. The second thought here is this: This purifying of ourselves is the link or bridge between the present and the future.—‘Now are we the sons of God,’ says John in the context. That is the pier upon the one side of the gulf. ‘It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but when He is made manifest we shall be like Him.’ That is the pier on the other. How are the two to be connected? There is only one way by which the present sonship will blossom and fruit into the future perfect likeness, and that is,—if we throw across the gulf, by God’s help day by day here, that bridge of our effort after growing likeness to Himself, and purity therefrom.

That is plain enough, I suppose. To speak in somewhat technical terms, the ‘law of continuity’ that we hear so much about, runs on between earth and Heaven; which, being translated into plain English, is but this—that the act of passing from the limitations and conditions of this transitory life into the solemnities and grandeurs of that future does not alter a man’s character, though it may intensify it. It does not make him different from what he was, though it may make him more of what he was, whether its direction be good or bad.

You take a stick and thrust it into water; and because the rays of light pass from one medium to another of a different density, they are refracted and the stick seems bent; but take the human life out of the thick, coarse medium of earth and lift it up into the pure rarefied air of Heaven, and there is no refraction; it runs straight on. Straight on! The given direction continues; and in whatever direction my face is turned when I die, thither my face will be turned when I live again.

Do not you fancy that there is any magic in coffins and

graves and shrouds to make men different from their former selves. The continuity runs clean on, the rail goes without a break, though it goes through the Mont Cenis tunnel; and on the one side is the cold of the North, and on the other the sunny South. The man is the same man through death and beyond.

So the one link between sonship here and likeness to Christ hereafter is this link of present, strenuous effort to become like Him day by day in personal purity. For there is another reason, on which I need not dwell, viz., unless there be this daily effort on our part to become like Jesus Christ by personal purity, we shall not be able to 'see Him as He is.' Death will take a great many veils off men's hearts. It will reveal to them a great deal that they do not know, but it will not give the faculty of beholding the glorified Christ in such fashion as that the beholding will mean transformation. 'Every eye shall see Him,' but it is conceivable that a spirit shall be so immersed in self-love and in godlessness that the vision of Christ shall be repellent and not attractive; shall have no transforming and no gladdening power. And I beseech you to remember that about that vision, as about the vision of God Himself, the principle stands true; it is 'the pure in heart that shall see God' in Christ. And the change from life to the life beyond will not necessarily transform into the image of His dear Son. You make a link between the present and the future by cleansing your hands and your hearts, through faith in the cleansing power of Christ, and direct effort at holiness.

III. Now I must briefly add finally: that this self-cleansing of which I have been speaking is the offspring and outcome of that 'hope' in my text. It is the child of hope. Hope is by no means an active faculty gener-

ally. As the poets have it, she may 'smile and wave her golden hair'; but she is not in the way of doing much work in the world. And it is not the mere fact of hope that generates this effort; it is, as I have been trying to show you, a certain kind of hope—the hope of being like Jesus Christ when 'we see Him as He is.'

I have only two things to say about this matter, and one of them is this: of course, such strenuous effort of purity will only be the result of such a hope as that, because such a hope will fight against one of the greatest of all the enemies of our efforts after purity. There is nothing that makes a man so down-hearted in his work of self-improvement as the constant and bitter experience that it seems to be all of no use; that he is making so little progress; that with immense pains, like a snail creeping up a wall, he gets up, perhaps, an inch or two, and then all at once he drops down, and further down than he was before he started.

Slowly we manage some little, patient self-improvement; gradually, inch by inch and bit by bit, we may be growing better, and then there comes some gust and outburst of temptation; and the whole painfully reclaimed soil gets covered up by an avalanche of mud and stones, that we have to remove slowly, barrow-load by barrow-load. And then we feel that it is all of no use to strive, and we let circumstances shape us, and give up all thoughts of reformation.

To such moods then there comes, like an angel from Heaven, that holy, blessed message, 'Cheer up, man! "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."' Every inch that you make now will tell then, and it is not all of no use. Set your heart to the work, it is a work that will be blessed and will prosper.

Again, here is a test for all you Christian people, who say that you look to Heaven with hope as to your home and rest.

A great deal of the religious contemplation of a future state is pure sentimentality, and like all pure sentimentality is either immoral or non-moral. But here the two things are brought into clear juxtaposition, the bright hope of Heaven and the hard work done here below. Now is that what the gleam and expectation of a future life does for you?

This is the-only time in John's Epistle that he speaks about hope. The good man, living so near Christ, finds that the present, with its 'abiding in Him,' is enough for his heart. And though he was the Seer of the Apocalypse, he has scarcely a word to say about the future in this letter of his, and when he does it is for a simple and intensely practical purpose, in order that he may enforce on us the teaching of labouring earnestly in purifying ourselves.

My brother, is that your type of Christianity? Is that the kind of inspiration that comes to you from the hope that steals in upon you in your weary hours, when sorrows, and cares, and changes, and loss, and disappointments, and hard work weigh you down, and you say, 'It would be blessed to pass hence'? Does it set you harder at work than anything else can do? Is it all utilised? Or if I might use such an illustration, is it like the electricity of the Aurora Borealis, that paints your winter sky with vanishing, useless splendours of crimson and blue? or have you got it harnessed to your tramcars, lighting your houses, driving sewing-machines, doing practical work in your daily life? Is the hope of Heaven, and of being like Christ, a thing that stimulates and stirs

us every moment to heroisms of self-surrender and to strenuous martyrdom of self-cleansing?

All is gathered up into the one lesson. First, let us go to that dear Lord whose blood cleanseth from all sin, and let us say to Him, 'Purge me and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.' And then, receiving into our hearts the powers that purify, in His love and His sacrifice and His life, 'having these promises' and these possessions, 'Dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord.'

PRACTICAL RIGHTEOUSNESS

'Little children, let no man deceive you; he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous.'—1 JOHN iii. 7.

THE popular idea of the Apostle John is strangely unlike the real man. He is supposed to be the gentle Apostle of Love, the mystic amongst the Twelve. He is that, but he was the 'son of thunder' before he was the Apostle of Love, and he did not drop the first character when he attained the second. No doubt his central thought was, 'God is Love'; no doubt that thought had refined and assimilated his character, but the love which he believed and the love which he exercised were neither of them facile feebleness, but strong and radiant with an awful purity. None of the New Testament writers proclaims a more austere morality than does John. And just because he loved the Love and the Light, he hated and loathed the darkness. He can thunder and lighten when needful, and he shows us that the true divine love in a

man recoils from its opposite as passionately as it cleaves to God and good.

Again, John is, *par excellence*, the mystic of the New Testament, always insisting on the direct communion which every soul may have with God, which is the essence of wholesome mysticism. Now that type of thinking has often in its raptures forgotten plain, pedestrian morality; but John never commits that error. He never soars so high as to lose sight of the flat earth below; and whilst he is always inviting us and enjoining us to dwell in God and abide in Christ, with equal persistence and force he is preaching to us the plainest duties of elementary morality.

He illustrates this moral earnestness in my text. The 'little children' for whom he was so affectionately solicitous were in danger, either from teachers or from the tendencies native in us all, to substitute something else for plain, righteous conduct; and the Apostle lovingly appeals to them with his urgent declaration, that the only thing which shows a man to be righteous—that is to say, a disciple of Christ—is his daily life, in conformity with Christ's commands. The errors of these ancient Asiatics live to-day in new forms, but still substantially the same. And they are as hard to kill amongst English Nonconformists like us as they were amongst Asiatic Christians nineteen centuries ago.

I. So let me try just to insist, first of all, on that thought that doing righteousness is the one test of being a Christian.

Now that word 'righteousness' is a theological word, and by much usage the lettering has got to be all but obliterated upon it; and it is worn smooth like sixpences that go from pocket to pocket. Therefore I want, before

I go further, to make this one distinct point, that the New Testament righteousness is no theological, cloistered, peculiar kind of excellence, but embraces within its scope 'whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are fair, whatsoever things are of good report'; all that the world calls virtue, all which the world has combined to praise. There are countries on the earth which are known by different names to their inhabitants and to foreigners. The 'righteousness' of the New Testament, though it embraces a great deal more, includes within its map all the territories which belong to morality or to virtue. The three words cover the same ground, though one of them covers more than the other two. The New Testament 'righteousness' differs from the moralist's morality, or the world's virtue, in its scope, inasmuch as it includes our relations to God as well as to men; it differs in its perspective, inasmuch as it exalts some types of excellence that the world pooh-poohs, and pulls down some that the world hallelujahs and adulates; it strips the fine feathers of approving words off some vices which masquerade as virtues. It casts round the notion of duty, of morality, of virtue, a halo, and it touches it with emotion. Christianity does with the dictates of the natural conscience what we might figure as being the leading out of some captive virgin in white, from the darkness into the sunshine, and the turning of her face up to heaven, which illuminates it with a new splendour, and invests her with a new attractiveness. But all that any man rightly includes in his notion of the things that are 'of good report' is included in this theological word, righteousness, which to some of you seems so wrapped in mists, and so far away from daily life.

I freely confess that in very many instances the mo-

rality of the moralist has outshone the righteousness of the Christian. Yes! and I have seen canoe-paddles carved by South Sea Islanders with no better tools than an oyster-shell and a sharp fish-bone, which in the minuteness and delicacy of their work, as well as in the truth and taste of their pattern, might put to shame the work of carvers with better tools. But that is not the fault of the tools; it is the fault of the carvers. And so, whilst we acknowledge that Christian people have but poorly represented to the world what Christ and Christ's apostles meant by righteousness, I reiterate that the righteousness of the gospel is the morality of the world *plus* a great deal more.

That being understood, let me remind you of two or three ways in which this great truth of the text is obscured to us, and in some respects contradicted, in the practice of many professing Christians. First, let me say my text insists upon this, that the conduct, not the creed, makes the Christian. There is a continual tendency on our part, as there was with these believers in Asia Minor long ago, to substitute the mere acceptance, especially the orthodox acceptance, of certain great fundamental Christian truths for Christianity. A man may believe thirty-nine or thirty-nine thousand Articles without the smallest intellectual drawback, and not be one whit nearer being a Christian than if he did not believe one of them. For faith, which is the thing that makes a man a Christian to begin with, is not assent, but trust. And there is a whole gulf, wide enough to drown a world in, between the two attitudes of mind. On the one side of the gulf is salvation, on the other side of the gulf there may be loss. Of course, I know that it is hard, though I do not believe it is impossible, to erect the structure of

a saving faith on a very, very imperfect intellectual apprehension of Scripture truth. That has nothing to do with my present point. What I am saying is that, unless you erect that structure of a faith which is an act of your will and of your whole nature, and not the mere assent of your understanding, upon your belief, your belief is impotent, and is of no use at all, and you might as well not have it.

What is the office of our creed in regard to our conduct? To give us principles, to give us motives, to give us guidance, to give us weapons. If it does these things then it does its work. If it lies in our heads a mere acceptance of certain propositions, it is just as useless and as dead as the withered seeds that rattle inside a dried poppy-head in the autumn winds. You are meant to begin with accepting truth, and then you are meant to take that truth as being a power in your lives that shall shape your conduct. To know, and there an end, is enough in matters of mere science, but in matters of religion and in matters of morality or righteousness knowing is only the first step in the process, and we are made to know in order that, knowing, we may do.

But some professing Christians seem to have their natures built, like ocean-going steamers, with water-tight compartments, on the one side of which they keep their creed, and there is no kind of communication between that and the other side where their conduct is originated. 'Little children, let no man deceive you; he that doeth righteousness is righteous.'

Again, my text suggests conduct and not emotion.

Now there is a type of Christian life which is more attractive in appearance than that of the hard, fossilised, orthodox believer—viz., the warmly emotional and fer-

vent Christian. But that type, all experience shows, has a pit dug close beside it into which it is apt to fall. For there is a strange connection between emotional Christianity and a want of straightforwardness in daily business life, and of self-control and government of the appetites and the senses. That has been sadly shown, over and again, and if we had time one could easily point to the reasons in human nature, and its strange contexture, why it should be so. Now I am not disparaging emotion—God forbid—for I believe that to a very large extent the peculiarity of Christian teaching is just this, that it does bring emotion to bear upon the hard grind of daily duty. But for all that, I am bound to say that this is a danger which, in this day, by reason of certain tendencies in our popular Christianity, is a very real one, and that you will find people gushing in religious enthusiasm, and then going away to live very questionable, and sometimes very mean, and sometimes even very gross and sensual lives. The emotion is meant to spring from the creed, and it is meant to be the middle term between the creed and the conduct. Why, we have learnt to harness electricity to our tramcars, and to make it run our messages, and light our homes, and that is like what we have to do with the emotion without which a man's Christianity will be a poor, scraggy thing. It is a good servant; it is a bad master. You do not show yourselves to be Christians because you gush. You do not show yourselves to be Christians because you can talk fervidly and feel deeply. Raptures are all very well, but what we want is the grind of daily righteousness, and doing little things because of the fear and the love of the Lord.

May I say again, my text suggests conduct, and not

verbal worship. You and I, in our adherence to a simpler, less ornate and æsthetic form of devotion than prevails in the great Episcopal churches, are by no means free from the danger which, in a more acute form, besets them, of substituting participation in external acts of worship for daily righteousness of life *Laborare est orare*—to work is to pray. That is true with explanations, commentaries, and limitations. But I wonder how many people there are who sing hymns which breathe aspirations and wishes that their whole daily life contradicts. And I wonder how many of us there are who seem to be joining in prayers that we never expect to have answered, and would be very much astonished if the answers came, and should not know what to do with if they did come. We live in one line, and worship in exactly the opposite. Brethren, creed is necessary; emotion is necessary; worship is necessary! But that on which these three all converge, and for which they are, is daily life, plain, practical righteousness.

II. Now let me say, secondly, that being righteous is the way to do righteousness.

One of the great characteristics of New Testament teaching of morality, or rather let me say of Christ's teaching of morality, is that it shifts, if I may so put it, the centre of gravity from acts to being, that instead of repeating the parrot-cry, 'Do, do, do,' or 'Do not, do not, do not,' it says, 'Be, and the doing will take care of itself. Be; do not trouble so much about outward acts, look after the inward nature.' Character makes conduct, though, of course, conduct reacts upon character. 'As a man thinketh in his heart so is he,' and the way to set actions right is to set the heart right.

Some of us are trying to purify the stream by putting

in disinfectants half-way down, instead of going up to the source and dealing with the fountain. And the weakness of all the ordinary, commonplace morality of the world is that it puts its stress upon the deeds, and leaves comparatively uncared for the condition of the person, the inward self, from whom the deeds come. And so it is all superficial, and of small account.

If that be so, then we are met by this experience: that when we honestly try to make the tree good that its fruit may be good we come full front up to this, that there is a streak in us, a stain, a twist—call it anything you like—like a black vein through a piece of Parian marble, or a scratch upon a mirror, which streak or twist baffles our effort to make ourselves righteous. I am not going, if I can help it, to exaggerate the facts of the case. The Christian teaching of what is unfortunately called total depravity is not that there is no good in anybody, but that there is a diffused evil in everybody which affects in different degrees and in different ways all a man's nature. And that is no mere doctrine of the New Testament, but it is a transcript from the experience of every one of us.

What then? If I must be righteous in order that I may do righteousness, and if, as I have found out by experience (for the only way to know myself is to reflect upon what I have done)—if I have found out that I am not righteous, what then? You may say to me, 'Have you led me into a blind alley, out of which I cannot get? Here you are, insisting on an imperative necessity, and in the same breath saying that it is impossible. What is left for me?' I go on to tell you what is left.

III. Union with Jesus Christ by faith makes us 'righteous even as He is righteous.'

There is the pledge, there is the prophecy, there is the pattern; and there is the power to redeem the pledge, to fulfil the prophecy, to make the pattern copyable and copied by every one of us. Brethren, this is the very heart of John's teaching, that if we will, not by the mere assent of our intellect, but by the casting of ourselves on Jesus Christ, trust in Him, there comes about a union between us and Him so real, so deep, so vital, so energetic, that by the touch of His life we live, and by His righteousness breathed into us, we, too, may become righteous. The great vessel and the tiny pot by its side may have a connecting pipe, and from the great one there shall flow over into the little one as much as will fill it brim full. In Him we too may be righteous.

My friend, there are men and women who are ready to set to their seals that that is true, and who can say, 'I have found it so. By union with Jesus Christ in faith, I have received new tastes, new inclinations, a new set to my whole life, and I have been able to overcome unrighteousnesses which were too many and too mighty for myself.' It is so; and some of us to our own consciences and consciousness are witnesses to it, however imperfectly. God forgive us! We may have manifested the renewing power of union with Christ in our daily lives.

'Even as He is righteous'—the water in the great vessel and the little one are the same, but the vase is not the cistern. The beam comes from the sun, but the beam is not the sun. 'Even as' does not mean equality, but it does mean similarity. Christ is righteous, eternally, essentially, completely; we may be 'even as He is' derivatively, partially, and if we put our trust in Him we shall be so, and that growingly through our daily lives. And then, after earth is done with, 'we know that, when He

shall be manifested, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.'

May we each, dear brethren, 'be found in Him, not having our own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.'

CHRIST'S MISSION THE REVELATION OF GOD'S LOVE

'Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.'—1 JOHN iv. 10.

THIS is the second of a pair of twin verses which deal with substantially the same subject under two slightly different aspects. The thought common to both is that Christ's mission is the great revelation of God's love. But in the preceding verse the point on which stress is laid is the manifestation of that love, and in our text the point mainly brought out is its essential nature. In the former we read, 'In this was *manifested* the love of God,' and in the present verse we read, 'Herein *is* love.' In the former verse John fixes on three things as setting forth the greatness of that manifestation—viz., that the Christ is the only begotten Son, that the manifestation is for the world, and that its end is the bestowment of everlasting love. In my text the points which are fixed on are that that Love in its nature is self-kindled—'not that we loved God, but that He loved us'—and that it lays hold of, and casts out of the way that which, unre-moved, would be a barrier between God and us—viz., our sin: 'He hath sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.'

Now it is interesting to notice that these twin verses, like a double star which reflects the light of a central sun, draw their brightness from the great word of the Master, 'God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' Do you not hear the echo of His voice in the three expressions in the verse before the text—'only begotten,' 'world,' 'live'? Here is one more of the innumerable links which bind together in indissoluble union the Gospel and the Epistle. So, then, the great thought suggested by the words before us is just this, that in the Incarnation and Sacrifice of Jesus Christ we have the great revelation of the love of God.

I. Now there are three questions that suggest themselves to me, and the first is this, What, then, does Christ's mission say about God's love?

I do not need to dwell on the previous question whether, apart from that mission, there is any solid revelation of the fact that there is love in Heaven, or whether we are left, apart from it, to gropings and probabilities. I need not refer you to the ambiguous oracles of nature or to the equally ambiguous oracles of life. I need not, I suppose, do more than just remind you that even the men whose faith grasps the thought of the love of God most intensely, know what it is to be brought to a stand before some of the dreadful problems which the facts of humanity and the facts of nature press upon us, nor need I remind you how, as we see around us to-day, in the drift of our English literature and that of other nations, when men turn their backs upon the Cross, they look upon a landscape all swathed in mists, and on which darkness is steadily settling. The reason why the

men of this generation, some of them very superficially, and for the sake of being 'in the swim,' and some of them despairingly and with bleeding hearts, are turning themselves to a reasoned pessimism, is because they will not see what shines out from the Cross, that God is love.

Nor need I do more than remind you, in a word, of the fact that, go where we will through this world, and consult all the conceptions that men have made to themselves of gods many and lords many, whilst we find the deification of power, and of vice, and of fragmentary goodnesses, of hopes and fears, of longings, of regrets, we find nowhere a god of whom the characteristic is love. And amidst that Pantheon of deities, some of them savage, some of them lustful, some of them embodiments of all vices, some of them indifferent and neutral, some of them radiant and fair, none reveals this secret, that the centre of the universe is a heart. So we have to turn away from hopes, from probability dashed with many a doubt, and find something that has more solid substance in it, if it is to be enough to bear up the man that grasps it and to yield before no tempests. For all that Bishop Butler says, probabilities are *not* the guide of life, in its deepest and noblest aspects. They may be the guide of practice, but for the anchorage of the soul we want no shifting sand-bank, but that to which we may make fast and be sure that, whatever shifts, it remains immovable. You can no more clothe the soul in 'perhappses' than a man can make garments out of a spider's web. Religion consists of the things of which we are sure, and not of the things which are probable. 'Peradventure' is not the word on which a man can rest the weight of a crushed, or an agonising, or a sinking soul; he must have 'Verily! verily!' and then he is at rest.

How do we know what a man is? By seeing what a man does. How do we know what God is? By knowing what God does. So John does not argue with logic, either frosty or fiery, but he simply opens his mouth, and in calm, pellucid utterances sets forth the truths and leaves them to work. He says to us, 'I do not relegate you to your intuitions; I do not argue with you; I simply say, Look at Him; look, and see that God is love.'

What, then, does the mission of Christ say to us about the love of God? It says, first, that it is a love independent of, and earlier than, ours. We love, as a rule, because we recognise in the object to which our heart goes out something that draws it, something that is loveable. But He whose name is 'I am that I am' has all the reasons of His actions within Himself, and just as He

'Sits on no precarious throne,
Nor borrows leave to be,'

nor is dependent on any creature for existence, so He is His own motive, He is His own reason. Within that sacred circle of the Infinite Nature lie all the energies which bring that Infinite Nature into action; and like some clear fountain, more sparkling than crystal, there wells up for ever, from the depths of the Divine Nature, the love which is Himself. He loves, not because we love Him, but because He is God. The very sun itself, as some astronomers believe, owes its radiant brightness and ever-communicated warmth to the impact on, and reception into, it of myriads of meteors and of matter drawn from the surrounding system. So when the fuel fails, that fire will go out, and the sun will shrivel into a black ball. But this central Sun of the universe has

all His light within Himself, and the rays that pour out from Him owe their being and their motion to nothing but the force of that central fire, from which they rush with healing on their wings.

If, then, God's love is not evoked by anything in His creatures, then it is universal, and we do not need anxiously to question ourselves whether we deserve that it shall fall upon us, and no conscious unworthiness need ever make us falter in the least in the firmness with which we grasp that great central thought. The sun, inferior emblem as it is of that Light of all that is, pours down its beams indiscriminately on dunghill and on jewel, though it be true that in the one its rays breed corruption and in the other draw out beauty. That great love wraps us all, is older than our sins, and is not deflected by them. So that is the first thing that Christ's mission tells us about God's love.

The second is—it speaks to us of a love which gives its best. John says, 'God *sent* His Son,' and that word reposes, like the rest of the passage, on many words of Christ's—such as, for instance, when He speaks of Himself as 'sanctified and sent into the world,' and many another saying. But remember how, in the foundation passage to which I have already referred, and of which we have some reflection in the words before us, there is a tenderer expression—not merely 'sent,' but 'gave.' Paul strengthens the word when he says, 'gave *up* for us all.' It is not for us to speculate about these deep things, but I would remind you of what I dare say I have had occasion often to point out, that Paul seems to intend to suggest to us a mysterious parallel, when he further says, 'He that *spared* not His own Son, but freely gave Him up to death for us all.' For that emphatic word 'spared' is a

distinct allusion to, and quotation of, the story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac: 'Seeing thou hast not *withheld* from Me thine only son.' And so, mysterious as it is, we may venture to say that He not only sent, but He gave, and not only gave, but gave up. His love, like ours, delights to lavish its most precious gifts on its objects.

Now there arises from this consideration a thought which I only mention, and it is this. Christian teaching about Christ's work has often, both by its friends and its foes, been so presented as to lead to the conception that it was the work of Christ which made God love men. The enemies of evangelical truth are never tired of talking in that sense; and some of its unwise friends have given reason for the caricature. But the true Christian teaching is, 'God so loved . . . that He gave.' The love is the cause of the mission, and not the mission that which evokes the love. So let us be sure that, not because Christ died does God love us sinful creatures, but that, because God loves us, Christ died for us.

The third thing which the mission of Christ teaches us about the love of God is that it is a love which takes note of and overcomes man's sin. I have said, as plainly as I can, that I reject the travesty of Christianity which implies that it was Christ's mission which originated God's love to men. But a love that does not in the slightest degree care whether its object is good or bad—what sort of a love do you call that? What do you name it when a father shows it to his children? Moral indifference; culpable and weak and fatal. And is it anything nobler, if you transfer it to God, and say that it is all the same to Him whether a man is living the life of a hog, and forgetting all that is high and noble, or

whether he is pressing with all his strength towards light and truth and goodness? Surely, surely they who, in the name of their reverence for the supreme love of God, cover over the fact of His righteousness, are mutilating and killing the very attribute that they are trying to exalt. A love that cares nothing for the moral character of its object is not love, but hate; it is not kindness, but cruelty. Take away the background because it is so black, and you lower the brilliancy of whiteness of that which stands in front of it. There is such a property in God as is fittingly described by that tremendous word 'wrath.' God cannot, being what He is, treat sin as if it were no sin; and therefore we read, 'He sent His son to be the *propitiation* for our sins.' The black dam, which we build up between ourselves and the river of the water of life, is to be swept away; and it is the death of Jesus Christ which makes it possible for the highest gift of God's love to pour over the ruined and partially removed barrier and to flood a man's soul. Brethren, no God that is worthy the name can give Himself to a sinful soul. No sinful soul that has not the habit, the guilt, the penalty of its sins swept away, is capable of receiving the life, which is the highest gift of the love. So our twin texts divide what I may call the process of redemption between them; and whilst the one says, 'He sent His Son that we should have life through Him,' the other tells us of how the sins which bar the entrance of that life into our hearts, as our own consciences tell us they do, can be removed. There must first be the propitiation for our sins, and then that mighty love reaches its purpose and attains its end, and can give us the life of God to be the life of our souls. So much for my first and principle question.

II. Now I have to ask, secondly, how comes it that Christ's mission says anything about God's love?

That question is a very plain one, and I should like to press the answer to it very emphatically. Take any other of the great names of the world's history of poet, thinker, philosopher, moralist, practical benefactor; is it possible to apply such a thought as this to them—except with a hundred explanations and limitations—that they, however radiant, however wise, however beneficent, however fruitful their influence, make men sure that God loves them? The thing is ridiculous, unless you are using language in a very fantastic and artificial fashion.

Christ's mission reveals God's love, because Christ is the Son of God. If it is true, as Jesus said, that 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father,' then I can say, 'In Thy tenderness, in Thy patience, in Thy attracting of the publican and the harlot, in Thy sympathy with all the erring and the sorrowful, and, most of all, in Thy agony and passion, in Thy cross and death, I see the glory of God which is the love of God.' Brother, if you break that link, which binds the man Christ Jesus with the ever-living and the ever-loving God, I know not how you can draw from the record of His life and death a confidence, which nothing can shake, in the love of the Father.

Then there is another point. Christ's mission speaks to us about God's love, if—and I was going to say *only* if—we regard it as His mission to be the propitiation for our sins. Strike out the death as the sacrifice for the world's sin, and what you have left is a maimed something, which may be, and I thankfully recognise often is, very strengthening, very helpful, very calming, very ennobling, even to men who do not sympathise with the

view of that work which I am now setting forth, but which is all that to them, very largely, because of the unconscious influence of the truths which they have cast away. It seems to me that those who, in the name of the highest paternal love of God, reject the thought of Christ's sacrificial death, are kicking away the ladder by which they have climbed, and are better than their creeds, and happily illogical. It is the Cross that reveals the love, and it is the Cross as the means of propitiation that pours the light of that blessed conviction into men's hearts.

III. My last question is this: what does Christ's mission say about God's love to me?

We know what it ought to say. It ought to carry, as on the crest of a great wave, the conviction of that divine love into our hearts, to be fruitful there. It ought to sweep out, as on the crest of a great wave, our sins and evils. It ought to do this; does it? On some of us I fear it produces no effect at all. Some of you, dear friends, look at that light with lack-lustre eyes, or, rather, with blind eyes, that are dark as midnight in the blaze of noonday. The voice comes from the Cross, sweet as that of harpers harping with their harps, and mighty as the voice of many waters, and you hear nothing. Some of us it slightly moves now and then, and there an end.

Brethren, you have to turn the world-wide generality into a personal possession. You have to say, 'He loved *me*, and gave Himself for *me*.' It is of no use to believe in a universal Saviour; do you trust in your particular Saviour? It is of no use to have the most orthodox and clear conceptions of the relation between the Cross of Christ and the revelation to men of the love of God; have you made that revelation the means of bringing into your

own personal life the conviction that Jesus Christ is *your* Saviour, the propitiation for *your* sins, the Giver to *you* of life eternal? It is faith that does that. Note that, in the great foundation passage to which I have made frequent reference, there are two conditions put in between the beginning and the end. Some of us are disposed to say, 'God so loved the world that every man might have eternal life.' That is not what Christ said, 'God so loved the world that'—and here follows the first condition—'He *gave His Son* that'—and here follows the second—'he that *believeth on Him* should not perish, but have everlasting life.' God has done what it is needful for Him to do. His part of the conditions has been fulfilled. Fulfil yours—'He that believeth on Him.' And if you can say, not He is the propitiation for our sin, but for *my* sin, then you will live and move and have your being in a heaven of love, and will love Him back again with an echo and reflection of His own, and nothing shall be able to separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

THE SERVANT AS HIS LORD

'... As He is, so are we in this world.'—1 JOHN iv. 17.

LARGE truths may be spoken in little words. Profundity is often supposed to be obscurity, but the deepest depth is clear. John, in his gospel and epistles, deals with the deepest realities, and with all things in their eternal aspects, but his vocabulary is the simplest in the New Testament. God and the world, life and death, love and hate, light and darkness, these are the favourite words

round which his thoughts gather. Here are nine little monosyllables. What can be simpler than, 'As He is, so are we in this world?' And what can go beyond the thought that lies in it, that a Christian is a living likeness of Christ?

But the connection of my text is quite as striking as its substance. John has been dwelling upon his favourite thought that to abide in love is to abide in God, and God in us. And then he goes on to say that 'Herein'—that is, in such mutual abiding in love—is love made perfect with us'; and the perfection of that love, which is thus communion, is in order that, at the great solemn day of future trial, men may lift up their faces and meet His glance—which is *not* strange to them, nor met for the first time—with open-hearted and open-countenanced 'boldness.' But 'love' and 'abiding' are the source of confidence in the Day of Judgment, because love and abiding are the source of assimilation to Christ's life. We have boldness, 'because as He is, so are we in this world'; and we are as He is, because we love and abide in Him. So here are three thoughts, the assimilation of the Christian man to Christ; the frank confidence which it begets; and the process by which it is secured.

I. A Christian is Christ's living likeness.

That is a startling thing to say, and all the more startling if you notice that John does not say 'As He *was*,' in this earthly life of humiliation and filial obedience, but 'as He *is*,' in His heavenly life and reign and glory. That might well repel us from all thought of possible resemblance, but the light, however brilliant it may be, is not blinding, and it is the Christ as He *is*, and not only—true as that is—the Christ as He *was*, who is the original of which Christian men are copies.

Now *there* is the difference between the teaching of such classes of religionists as represent Christ's humanity as all in all, and preach to us that He, in His earthly life is the pattern to whom we are to seek to conform our lives, and the true evangelical teaching. That dead Man is living, and His present life has in it elements which we can grasp, and to which every Christian life is to be conformed.

Is there anything, then, within the glory to which I, in my poor, struggling, hampered, imperfect life here on earth, can feel that my character is being shaped? Yes, surely there is. I have no doubt that, in the words of my text, the Apostle is remembering the solemn ones of our Lord's high-priestly prayer as recorded in the seventeenth chapter of his gospel, where the same antithesis of our being in the world, and His not being there, recurs; and where the analogy and resemblance are distinctly stated—'I in Thee, and Thou in Me, that they also may be in us.'

So, then, when we stand with our letter-writer in his Patmos island, and see the countenance 'as the sun shining in his strength, and the eyes as a flame of fire,' and the many crowns upon the head, and the many stars in the hand, though we may feel as if all resemblance was at an end, and aspiration after likeness could only fall at His feet and cover its face, yet there is within the glory something which may be repeated and reproduced in our lives, and that is, the indissoluble union of a Son with a Father, in all loving obedience, in all perfect harmony, in all mutual affection and outgoing of heart and thoughts. This is the centre of the life, alike of the Christ when He is glorified, and of the Christ when He was upon earth. So the very secret heart of the mysteri-

ous being of the Son is to be, and necessarily is, repeated in all those who in Him have received the adoption of sons.

Or to put the whole thing into plainer words, it is the religious and the moral aspects of Christ's being, and not any one particular detail thereof; and these, as they live and reign on the Throne, just as truly as these, as they suffered and wept upon earth—it is these to which it is our destiny to be conformed. We are like Him, if we are His, in this,—that we are joined to God, that we hold fellowship with Him, that our lives are all permeated with the divine, that we are saturated with the presence of God, that we have submitted ourselves to Him and to His will, that 'not my will, but Thine, be done' is the very inmost meaning of our hearts and our lives. And thus 'we,' even here, 'bear the image of the heavenly, as we have borne the images of the earthly.' Now I am not going to dwell upon details; all these can be filled in by each of us for himself. The centre-point which I insist upon is this—the filial union with God, the filial submission to Him, and the consequent purity as Christ is pure, righteousness as Christ is righteous, and walking even as Christ walked, for ever in the light.

But then there is another point that I desire to refer to. I have put an emphasis upon the 'is' instead of the 'was,' as it applies to Jesus Christ. I would further put an emphasis upon the 'are,' as it applies to us—'*So are we.*'

John is not exhorting, he is affirming. He is not saying what Christian men ought to strive to be, but he is saying what all Christian men, by virtue of their Christian character, *are*. Or, to put it into other words, likeness to the Master is certain. It is inevitably involved in

the relation which a Christian man bears to the Lord. There may be degrees in the likeness, there may be differences of skill and earnestness in the artist. We have to labour like a portrait painter, slowly and tentatively approaching to the complete resemblance. It is 'a life-long task ere the lump be leavened.' This likeness does not reach its completeness by a leap. It is not struck, as the image of a king is, upon the blank metal disc, by one stroke, but it is wrought out by long, laborious, and, as I said, approximating and tentative touches. My text suggests that to us by its addition, 'So are we, *in this world.*' The 'world'—or, to use modern phraseology, 'the environment'—conditions the resemblance. As far as it is possible for a thing encompassed with dust and ashes to resemble the radiant sun in the heavens, so far is the resemblance carried here. Some measure of it, and a growing measure, is inseparable from the reality of a Christian life.

Now, you Christian people, does that plain statement touch you anywhere? 'So *are* we.' Well! you would be quite easy if John had said: 'So *may* we be; so *should* we be; so *shall* we be.' But what about the '*so are* we'? What a ghastly contradiction the lives of multitudes of professing Christians are to that plain statement! 'Like Jesus Christ'—would anybody say that about anything in me? 'So are we'—no words of mine, dear brethren, can make the statement more searching, more impressive; but, I pray you, lay this to heart: 'If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.' You may take sacraments and profess Christianity, or, as we Non-conformists have it, 'join churches,' and do all manner of outward work for ever and a day; but if you have not the likeness of Christ, at least in germ, and growing to

something more than a germ, in your characters, you had better revise your position, and ask whether, after all, you have not been walking in a vain show, and fancied yourselves the servants of Christ, while you bear the image of Christ's enemy.

A very tiny gully on a hillside, made by showers of rain, may fall into the same slopes, and has been created by the very same forces, working according to the same laws, as have scooped out valleys miles broad, bordered by mountains thousands of feet high. And in my little life, poor as it is, limited as it is, environed as it is by the world, and therefore often hampered and stained, as well as helped and brightened, by its environment, there may be, and there will be, in some degree, if I am a Christian man, the very same power at work by which Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father shines as the sun on the throne of the universe.

But then, notice further, how that limitation to which I have referred in this world carries with it another message. *There* is Christ in the heavens, veiled and unseen. Here are you on earth, his representative. There is a rage at present for putting pictures into all books, and folk will scarcely read unless they get illustrated literature. The world has for its illustrations of the gospel the lives of us Christian people. In the book there are principles and facts, and readers should be able to turn the page and see all pictured in us.

That is what you are set to do in this world. 'As the Father sent Me, even so send I you.' 'As He is, so are we in this world.' It may be our antagonist, but it is our sphere, and its presence is necessary to evoke our characters. Christ has entrusted His reputation, His honour, to us, and many a man that never cares to look

at *Him* as He is revealed in Scripture, would be wooed and won to look at Him and love Him, if we Christian people were more true to our vocation, and bore more conspicuously on our faces and in our characters the image of the heavenly.

II. Look for a moment at the second thought that is here: such a likeness to Jesus Christ is the only thing that will enable a man to lift up his head in the Day of Judgment.

'We have boldness,' says John, *because* 'as He is, so are we.' Now that is a very strong statement of a truth that popular, evangelical theology has far too much obscured. People talk about being, at the last, 'accepted in the beloved.' God be thanked, it is true. A sweet old hymn that a great many of us learned when we were children, though it is not so well known in these days, says:—

'Bold shall I stand in that great day,
For who aught to my charge shall lay,
While through Thy blood absolved I am
From sin's tremendous curse and shame?'

I believe that, and I try to preach it. But do not let us forget the other side. My text is in full accordance with the principles of our Lord's own teaching; and who knows the principles of His own words so well as the judge, who tells us, in His pictures of that great day, that the question put to every man will be, not what you *believe*, but what did you *do*, and what *are* you?

But this truth of my text has been not only wounded in the house of the friends of Christianity, but it has been overlooked by one of the very frequent objections that we hear made to evangelical teaching, that, according to it, a man is judged according to his belief and not

according to his deeds. A man is judged according to his—not *belief*—but according to his *faith*. But he is judged according also to—not his *work*—but according to his *character*.

And I wish, dear friends, to lay this upon your hearts, because many of us are too apt to forget it, that whilst unquestionably the beginning of salvation, and the condition of forgiveness here, and of acceptance hereafter, are laid in trust in Jesus Christ, that trust is sure to work out a character which is in conformity with His requirements and moulded after the likeness of Himself. 'The judgment of God is according to truth,' and what a man is determines where a man shall be, and what he shall receive through all eternity. Remember Christ's own teaching. Remember the teaching of that other apostle than John, according to which the 'wood, hay, stubble,' built by a man upon the foundation shall be burned up, and the builder himself be saved, yet so as by fire. And lay this to heart, that it is only when faith works in us, through love and communion, characters like Jesus Christ's, that we shall be able to stand—though even then we shall have to trust to divine and infinite mercy, and to the sprinkling of His blood—before the Throne of God. Lay up in store for yourselves a good foundation unto eternal life. And take this as the preaching of my text; character, and character alone, will stand the judgment of that great day.

There is no real antagonism between such truths and the widest preaching of salvation by faith. It is the same man who, in his gospel, says, as from the lips of the Lord Himself, 'He that believeth is not judged,' and in his letter says, 'We may have boldness in that day, because, as He is, so are we in this world.'

III. One word about the last point; the process by which this likeness is secured.

That is contained, as I tried to show in my introductory remarks, in the earlier part of the verse. Our love is made perfect by dwelling in God, and God in us; in order that we may be thus conformed to Christ's likeness, and so have boldness in that great day. To be like Jesus Christ, what is needed is that we love Him, and that we keep in touch with Him. What is it to 'abide' in Him?—to direct the continual flow of mind and love and will and practical obedience to Him, to bear Him ever in the secret place of my heart whilst my hands are occupied with daily business, and my feet are running the sometimes rough race that is set before me. Think of Him ever, love Him ever. Let His name be like a perfume breathed through the whole atmosphere of your lives. Keep your wills in the attitude of submission, of acceptance, of indecision when necessary, and of absolute dependence upon Him. Let your outward acts be such as shall not bring a film of separation between Him and you. When thus our whole being is steeped and drenched with Christ, then it cannot but be that we shall be like Him. Even 'clouds themselves as suns appear, when the sun pierces them with light.' 'Abide in Me, and I in you.' You cannot make yourselves like Christ, but you can fasten yourselves to Christ, and He will give you power which shall make you like Him.

But, remember, such abiding is no idle waiting, no passive confidence. It is full of energy, full of suppression, when necessary, of what is contrary to your truest self, and full of strenuous cultivation of that which is in accord with the will of the Father, and with the likeness of the 'first-born among many brethren.'

Dear friends, lie in the light and you will become light. Abide in Christ, and you will get like Christ; and, being like Him, you will be able to lift up your heads, and rejoice when you front Him on the Throne, and you are at the bar. Then, when you are no more in the world, the likeness will be perfected, because the communion is complete. 'We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.'

LOVE AND FEAR

'There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.'—1 JOHN iv. 18.

JOHN has been speaking of boldness, and that naturally suggests its opposite—fear. He has been saying that perfect love produces courage in the day of judgment, because it produces likeness to Christ, who is the Judge. In my text he explains and enlarges that statement. For there is another way in which love produces boldness, and that is by its casting out fear. These two are mutually exclusive. The entrance of the one is for the other a notice to quit. We cannot both love and fear the same person or thing, and where love comes in, the darker form slips out at the door; and where Love comes in, it brings hand in hand with itself Courage with her radiant face. But boldness is the companion of love, only when love is perfect. For, inconsistent as the two emotions are, love, in its earlier stages and lower degrees, is often perturbed and dashed by apprehension and dread.

Now John is speaking about the two emotions in themselves, irrespective, so far as his language goes, of the objects to which they are directed. What he is saying

is true about love and fear, whatever or whosoever may be loved or dreaded. But the context suggests the application in his mind, for it is 'boldness before him' about which he has been speaking; and so it is love and fear directed towards God which are meant in my text. The experience of hosts of professing Christians is only too forcible a comment upon the possibility of a partial Love lodging in the heart side by side with a fellow-lodger, Fear, whom it ought to have expelled. So there are three things here that I wish to notice—the empire of fear, the mission of fear, and the expulsion of fear.

I. The empire of fear.

Fear is a shrinking apprehension of evil as befalling us, from the person or thing which we dread. My text brings us face to face with that solemn thought that there are conditions of human nature, in which the God who ought to be our dearest joy and most ardent desire becomes our ghastliest dread. The root of such an unnatural perversion of all that a creature ought to feel towards its loving Creator lies in the simple consciousness of discordance between God and man, which is the shadow cast over the heart by the fact of sin. God is righteous; God righteously administers His universe. God enters into relations of approval or disapproval with His responsible creature. Therefore there lies, dormant for the most part, but present in every heart, and active in the measure in which that heart is informed as to itself, the slumbering, cold dread that between it and God things are *not* as they ought to be.

I believe, for my part, that such a dumb, dim consciousness of discord attaches to all men, though it is often smothered, often ignored, and often denied. But there it is; the snake hibernates, but it is coiled in the

heart all the same; and warmth will awake it. Then it lifts its crested head, and shoots out its forked tongue, and venom passes into the veins. A dread of God is the ghastliest thing in the world, the most unnatural, but universal, unless expelled by perfect love.

Arising from that discomforting consciousness of discord there come, likewise, other forms and objects of dread. For if I am out of harmony with Him, what will be my fate in the midst of a universe administered by Him, and in which all are His servants? Oh! I sometimes wonder how it is that godless men front the facts of human life and do not go mad. For here are we, naked, feeble, alone, plunged into a whirlpool, from the awful vortices of which we cannot extricate ourselves. There foam and swirl all manner of evils, some of them certain, some of them probable, any of them possible, since we are at discord with Him who wields all the forces of the universe, and wields them all with a righteous hand. 'The stars in their courses fight against' the man that does not fight for God. Whilst all things serve the soul that serve Him, all are embattled against the man that is against, or not for, God and His will.

Then there arises up another object of dread, which, in like manner, derives all its power to terrify and to hurt from the fact of our discordance with God; and that is 'the shadow feared of man,' that stands shrouded by the path, and waits for each of us.

God; God's universe; God's messenger, Death—these are facts with which we stand in relation, and if our relations with Him are out of gear, then He and all of these are legitimate objects of dread to us.

But now there is something else that casts out fear than perfect love, and that is—perfect levity. For it is

the explanation of the fact that so many of us know nothing of this fear of which I speak, and fancy that I am exaggerating, or putting forward false views. There is a type of man, and I have no doubt there are some of its representatives among my hearers, who are below both fear and love as directed towards God; for they never think about Him, or trouble their heads concerning either Him or their relations to Him or anything that flows therefrom. It is a strange faculty that we all have, of forgetting unwelcome thoughts and shutting our eyes to the things that we do not want to see, like Nelson when he puts the telescope to his blind eye at Copenhagen, because he would not obey the signal of recall. But surely it is an ignoble thing that men should ignore or shuffle out of sight with inconsiderateness the real facts of their condition, like boys whistling in a churchyard to keep their spirits up, and saying, 'Who's afraid?' just because they are so very much afraid. Ah, dear friends, do not rest until you face the facts, and having faced them, have found the way to reverse them! Surely, surely it is not worthy of men to turn away from anything so certain as that between a sin-loving man and God there must exist such a relation as will bring evil and sorrow to that man, as surely as God is and he is. I beseech you, take to heart these things, and do not turn away from them with a shake of your shoulders, and say, 'He is preaching the narrow, old-fashioned doctrine of a religion of fear.' No! I am not. But I am preaching this plain fact, that a man who is in discord with God has reason to be afraid, and I come to you with the old exhortation of the prophet, 'Be troubled, ye careless ones.' For there is nothing more ignoble or irrational than security which is only made possible by covering over

unwelcome facts. 'Be troubled'; and let the trouble lead you to the Refuge.

II. That brings me to the second point—viz., the mission of fear.

John uses a rare word in my text when he says 'fear hath torment.' 'Torment' does not convey the whole idea of the word. It means suffering, but suffering for a purpose; suffering which is correction; suffering which is disciplinary; suffering which is intended to lead to something beyond itself. Fear, the apprehension of personal evil, has the same function in the moral world as pain has in the physical. It is a symptom of disease, and is intended to bid us look for the remedy and the Physician. What is an alarm bell for but to rouse the sleepers, and to hurry them to the refuge? And so this wholesome, manly dread of the certain issue of discord with God is meant to do for us what the angels did for Lot—to lay a mercifully violent hand on the shoulder of the sleeper, and shake him into aroused wakefulness, and hasten him out of Sodom, before the fire bursts through the ground, and is met by the fire from above. The intention of fear is to lead to that which shall annihilate it by taking away its cause.

There is nothing more ridiculous, nothing more likely to destroy a man, than the indulgence in an idle fear which does nothing to prevent its own fulfilment. Horses in a burning stable are so paralysed by dread that they cannot stir, and get burnt to death. And for a man to be afraid—as every one ought to be who is conscious of unforgiven sin—for a man to be afraid and there an end, is absolute insanity. I fear; then what do I do? Nothing. That is true about hosts of us.

What ought I to do? Let the dread direct me to its

source, my own sinfulness. Let the discovery of my own sinfulness direct me to its remedy, the righteousness and the Cross of Jesus Christ. He, and He alone, can deal with the disturbing element in my relation to God. He can 'deliver me from my enemies, for they are too strong for me.' It is Christ and His work, Christ and His sacrifice, Christ and His indwelling Spirit that will grapple with and overcome sin and all its consequences, in any man and in every man; taking away its penalty, lightening the heart of the burden of its guilt, delivering from its love and dominion—all three of which things are the barbs of the arrows with which fear riddles heart and conscience. So my fear should proclaim to me the merciful 'Name that is above every name,' and drive me as well as draw me to Christ, the Conqueror of sin, and the Antagonist of all dread.

Brethren, I said I was not preaching the religion of Fear. But I think we shall scarcely understand the religion of Love unless we recognise that dread is a legitimate part of an unforgiven man's attitude towards God. My fear should be to me like the misshapen guide that may lead me to the fortress where I shall be safe. Oh, do not tamper with the wholesome sense of dread! Do not let it lie, generally sleeping, and now and then waking in your hearts, and bringing about nothing. Sailors that crash on with all sails set—stunsails and all—whilst the barometer is rapidly falling, and boding clouds are on the horizon, and the line of the approaching gale is ruffling the sea yonder, have themselves to blame if they founder. Look to the falling barometer, and make ready for the coming storm, and remember that the mission of fear is to lead you to the Christ who will take it away.

III. Lastly, the expulsion of fear.

My text points out the natural antagonism, and mutual exclusiveness, of these two emotions. If I go to Jesus Christ as a sinful man, and get His love bestowed upon me, then, as the next verse to my text says, my love springs in response to His to me, and in the measure in which that love rises in my heart will it frustrate its antagonistic dread.

As I said, you cannot love and fear the same person, unless the love is of a very rudimentary and imperfect character. But just as when you pour pure water into a bladder, the poisonous gases that it may have contained will be driven out before it, so when love comes in, dread goes out. The river, turned into the foul Augean stables of the heart, will sweep out all the filth and leave everything clean. The black, greasy smoke-wreath, touched by the fire of Christ's love, will flash out into ruddy flames, like that which has kindled them; and Christ's love will kindle in your hearts, if you accept it and apprehend it aright, a love which shall burn up and turn into fuel for itself the now useless dread.

But, brethren, remember that it is '*perfect love*' which 'casts out fear.'

Inconsistent as the two emotions are in themselves, in practice, they may be united, by reason of the imperfection of the nobler. And in the Christian life they are united with terrible frequency. There are many professing Christian people who live all their days with a burden of shivering dread upon their shoulders, and an icy cold fear in their hearts, just because they have not got close enough to Jesus Christ, nor kept their hearts with sufficient steadfastness under the quickening influences of His love, to have shaken off their dread as a sick man's

distempered fancies. A little love has not mass enough in it to drive out thick, clustering fears. There are hundreds of professing Christians who know very little indeed of that joyous love of God which swallows up and makes impossible all dread, who, because they have not a loving present consciousness of a loving Father's loving will, tremble when they front in imagination, and still more when they meet in reality, the evils that must come, and who cannot face the thought of death with anything but shrinking apprehension. There is far too much of the old leaven of selfish dread left in the experiences of many Christians. 'I feared thee, because thou wert an austere man, and so, because I was afraid, I went and hid my talent, and did nothing for thee' is a transcript of the experience of far too many of us. The one way to get deliverance is to go to Jesus Christ and keep close by Him.

And my last word to you is, see that you resort only to the sane, sound way of getting rid of the wholesome, rational dread of which I have been speaking. You can ignore it; and buy immunity at the price of leaving in full operation the *causes* of your dread—and that is stupid. There is only one wise thing to do, and that is, to make sure work of getting rid of the occasion of dread, which is the fact of sin. Take all your sin to Jesus Christ; He will—and He only can—deal with it. He will lay His hand on you, as He did of old, with the characteristic word that was so often upon His lips, and which He alone is competent to speak in its deepest meaning, 'Fear not, it is I,' and He will give you the courage that He commands.

'God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.' 'Ye have not received

the spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father,' and cling to Him, as a child who knows his father's heart too well to be afraid of anything in his father, or of anything that his father's hand can send.

THE RAY AND THE REFLECTION

'We love Him, because He first loved us.'—1 JOHN iv. 19.

VERY simple words! but they go down into the depths of God, lifting burdens off the heart of humanity, turning duty into delight, and changing the aspect of all things. He who knows that God loves him needs little more for blessedness; he who loves God back again offers more than all burnt offering and sacrifices. But it is to be observed that the correct reading of my text, as you will find in the Revised Version, omits 'Him' in the first clause, and simply says 'we love,' without specifying the object. That is to say, for the moment John's thought is fixed rather on the inward transformation effected, from self-regard to love—than on considering the object on which the love is expended. When the heart is melted, the streams flow wherever there is a channel. The river, as he goes on to show us, parts into two heads, and love to God and love to man are, in their essence and root-principle, one thing.

So my text is the summary of all revelation about God, the ultimate word about all our relations to Him, and the all-inclusive directory as to our conduct to one another. To know that God loves, and to love again—there is a little pocket encyclopædia in two volumes, which

contains the smelted-down essence of all theology and of all morality. Let us look at these three points.

I. The ultimate word about God.

'He first loved us.' Properly and strictly speaking, that 'first' only declares the priority of the divine love towards us over ours towards Him. But we may fairly give it a wider meaning, and say—first of all, ere Creation and Time, away back in the abysmal depths of an everlasting and changeless heart, changeless in the sense that its love was eternal, but not changeless in the sense that love could have no place within it—first of all things was God's love; last to be discovered because most ancient of all. The foundation is disclosed last when you come to dig, and the essence is grasped last in the process of analysis.

So one of the old psalms, with wondrous depth of truth, traces up everything to this, 'For His mercy endureth for ever.' Therefore, there was time; therefore, there were creatures—'He made great lights, for His mercy endureth for ever.' Therefore, there were judgments—'He slew famous kings . . . for His mercy endureth for ever.' And so we may pass through all the works of the divine energy, and say, 'He first loved us.'

It is no accident that there are but foregleams of this great thought brightening the words and the thoughts of psalmist and prophet, saint and sage, from the beginning onwards, while the articulate utterance of the simple sentence was first heard from the lips of Him who declared the Father, and stands in that part of the Book which, both in its position there, and in its date of composition is the last of the Apostolic utterances. 'God is love';—that is in one aspect the foundation of His being, and in another aspect the shining ruby set on the very sky-

piercing summit of the completed process of the revelation of that Being to man. 'He first loved us'; and thence, from that centre and germinal point, streams out the whole train of consequences in the divine activity, and in the divine self-revelation.

I need not ask you to contrast with this infinitely simple and infinitely deep utterance all other thoughts of a divine Being—the cold abstractions of Theism, the dim dreads of popular apprehension, the vague utterances of any mythology, the clouds that men's thoughts have covered over the face of this great truth—and then, to set by the side of all these groping, these peradventures, these fears, these narrow, unworthy ideas, the clear simplicity, the infinite depth of 'He first loved us.'

But I may ask you to consider, but for a moment, the relation which all the other perfection of the divine nature have to this central and foundation one. There are all those pompous names, 'Omnipresence' and 'Omniscience' and the like, which are but the negations of the limitations of humanity or of finite creatures. There are the more spiritual and moral thoughts of Wisdom and Righteousness and the like. These are but the fringes of the glory: I was going to venture to say that the divinest thing in God is love. There is the central blaze; the rest is but the brilliant periphery that encloses it. And that infinite love stands to all these other attributes in the relation of being their master and motive spring. They are Love's instrument, and in the divine nature Love is Lord of all. They give it majesty; it gives them tenderness. We may reverently say, in regard to the divine nature, what the Apostle says about our humanity, that love is the 'bond of perfectness'—the girdle which, braced round all the garments, keeps them in their place.

For round these infinite, innumerable, unnameable, and named divine perfections, is that which brings them all into symmetry and keeps them all in harmonious action—Love. He has wisdom, and power, and eternal being, but He is Love.

But do not let us forget that whilst thus my text proclaims the ultimate truth, these other attributes, as they are called, are all smelted down, as it were, into, and present in, the love which is their crown. The same Apostle, who has thus the honour of ringing out to the world the good news that God is Love, declares that ‘this is the message’ which he has to tell, that ‘God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.’ So the light of righteousness, as well as the lambent flame of love, burn together on that central fire of the universe. We must not so conceive of the love of God, as to darken the radiance of His righteousness, or to obscure the brilliancy of that pure light which tolerates no admixture of darkness.

May I venture a step further, and ask whether we are not warranted in believing that in that which we call the love of God there do abide the same elements as characterise the thing that bears the same name in our human experience? The spectrum has told us that the constituents of the mighty sun in the heavens are the same as the constituents of this little darkened earth. And there are the same lines in the divine spectrum that there are in ours. So if we can venture to say of Him, He is Love, do not let us shrink from saying that then, like us, He delights in the companionship of His beloved; that, like us, He rejoices in giving Himself to His beloved; that, like us, but infinitely, He desires the good of His beloved; and that, like us, He seeks only for the requital of an answering love. All these things, the joy of the Lord in

man, the yielding of the Lord to man, the beneficent desire of the Lord for the good of man, and the hunger of the Lord for the response of love from man—all these things are affirmed when we affirm that God is Love.

Our Apostle would concur heartily in the great text which was the theme of a recent sermon. Paul said, 'God establishes His love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.' John says, 'Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.'

So the Cross of Christ is the one demonstration that God loved us. Looking to it we can say, with a great modern teacher:—

'So the All-great were the All-loving too,
So through the thunder comes a human voice,
Saying "Oh! heart I made; a heart beats here,
Face, My hands fashioned, see it in Myself;
Thou hast no power, nor mayest conceive of Mine;
But love I gave thee, with Myself to love,
And thou must love Me, who have died for thee."'

II. Here we have the ultimate word as to our religion.

'We love Him, because He first loved us.' There is a bridge wanted between these two, and the bridge is supplied abundantly in this letter, in entire harmony with the teaching of the rest of the New Testament. Much has been said, and profitably said, with reference to the modification of the general type of Christian teaching in the writings respectively of Paul, Peter, James, and John. I thankfully recognise the diversities. They are not divergencies; they are perfectly complementary, and may all be made to harmonise. This Apostle of love has also declared to us how it comes that the love which

burns at the centre of things, where there is a heart, kindles a responding love away out on the circumference of things, where there are men with hearts; and the bridge is—'We have known and believed the love that God hath to us.' So says John. And Paul, the Apostle of faith, who sometimes seems as if his only conception of the link of union between God and man was, on the part of man, faith, responds when he speaks of a faith which worketh, comes to energetic operation, through the love which it has kindled.

So we come to this, that a simple trust in the love of God, as manifested in Jesus Christ, our Lord, is the only thing which will so deal with man's natural self-regard and desire to make himself his own object and centre, as to substitute for that the victorious love to God. You cannot love God, unless you believe that He loves you. You will never be absolutely sure of that, unless you have learned it from the Cross of Christ. You will not respond with the love that He desires, but there will be a film between your ice and the fire that could melt it, until that is swept away by the simple act of confidence in God manifested to you in Jesus Christ. This is Christianity; this, nothing less, is religion—to love God, because I believe that in Jesus Christ God has loved me.

And that is the only thing that He desires or accepts. The Religion of Fear; what is it? 'Thou wert an austere man . . . and I was afraid.' Yes! and what did you do when you were afraid? 'I hid my talent in the ground,' and was utterly idle. Here rise, on either side of the valley, two mountains—Ebal and Gerazim. From the one were thundered the curses, from the other broke the benediction of the blessings; the one is barren, the other is verdant—'which thing is an allegory.' The Religion of

Fear does nothing, the Religion of Love does all. The Religion of Self-interest is narrow, poor, mostly inoperative of any lofty enthusiasm or high nobleness of character. The Religion of Duty; 'I ought to worship, I am bidden to do this, that, or the other thing, which I do not a bit like to do. I am forbidden to do this, that, and the other thing which I should very much like to do, if I durst'—that religion is the religion of a slave; and there are hosts of us that know nothing better. And so our Christianity is a feeble and an uncomfortable thing; and there are little joy, and little subjugation of the will, and little leaping up of the heart in glad obedience in it. I was talking to a good, aged man, not long ago, whose religion was of a very gloomy type. He said to me, 'As to love, I know next to nothing about it.' Ah! brethren, I am afraid that is true about a good many of us who call ourselves Christians.

Then let me say, too, that if we love Him, it will be the motive power and spring of all manner of obediences and glad services. Love is the mother-tincture, so to speak, which you can colour, and to which you can add in various ways, and produce variously tinted and tasted and perfumed commixtures. Love lies at the foundation of all Christian goodness. It will lead to the subjugation of the will; and that is the thing that is most of all needed to make a man righteous and pure. So St. Augustine's paradox, rightly understood, is a magnificent truth, 'Love! and do what you will.' For then you will be sure to will what God wills, and you ought.

If this be the summing-up of all religion, a practical conclusion follows. When we feel ourselves defective in the glow and operative driving power of love to God, what is the right thing to do? When a man is cold, he

will not warm himself by putting a clinical thermometer into his mouth, and taking his temperature, will he? Let him go into the sunshine and he will be warmed up. You can pound ice in a mortar, and except for the little heat generated by the impact of the pestle, it will keep ice still. But float the iceberg south into the tropics, and what has become of it? It has all run down into sweet, warm water, and mingled with the warm ocean that has dissolved it. So do not think about yourselves and your own loveless hearts so much, but think about God, and the infinite welling up of love in His heart to you, a great deal more. 'We love Him, because He first loved us'; therefore, to love Him more, we must feel more that He does love us.

III. Lastly, here is the ultimate word about our conduct to men.

I said that John, by leaving out any specification of the object of love, as well as by the verses that immediately follow, shows that he regards the emotion as one, though its direction is two-fold. That just comes to the plain truth, that the only victorious antagonist to the self-regarding temperament of average men, and the only power which will change philanthropy from a sentiment into a self-denying and active principle of conduct, is to be found in the belief of the love of God in Jesus Christ, and in answering love to Him.

That is a lesson for many sorts of people to-day. What they call altruism is no discovery of Christianity, but its practice is. I freely admit that there is much honest and self-sacrificing beneficence and benevolence which are not connected, in the men who practice them, with faith in Jesus Christ. But I question very much whether these would have existed if the story of the Cross had been un-

known. And suré I am that the history of non-Christian attempts to promote the brotherhood of man, and to diffuse a wide and operative love of mankind, teaches us, on the one side, that the emotion is not strong enough to last, and to work, unless it is based on God's love in Jesus Christ. And the history of Christianity, on the other side, though with many defects and things to be ashamed of, teaches us, conversely, that wherever there is a genuine love of God, its exterior form, so to say, the outside of it which is presented to the world, will be true love to man.

Christian people, lay this to heart; you are to be mirrors of the love to which you turn for all blessedness and peace. It is of no use to say, 'My religion is the love of God' unless the love of God is manifested in the love of man. If you love God, you will love those that God loves, those for whom Christ died, those who are just like what *you* were when you learned that God loved you. The service of God is the service of man.

One last word, 'We love Him, because He first loved us.' Do you? Or is it rather true of you: 'I do not love God, though He has loved me'? I saw not long since, up on the flank of a mountain, an obstinate patch of snow, that had fronted, in unmelted cold, months of the summer sun. There are some of us who lift a broad shield of thick-ribbed ice between ourselves and the radiance of the warm heart of God. Oh! brother; do not shut that love out of your heart; for if you do, you shut out peace and goodness, and shut in all manner of poisonous creatures and doleful shapes, whose companionship will be misery and death.

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